

Iranian EFL Learners' Awareness of (Im)politeness Strategies in English¹

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Abstract

The present study examined the different levels of (im)politeness strategies in expressing request, apology, and refusal speech acts across intermediate and advanced Iranian EFL learners to identify their attitudinal ratings of their produced structures in terms of pragmatic success and (im)politeness mannerism. A discourse completion test including 2 Likert scales on attitudinal appropriateness and an (im)politeness mannerism test for every item was distributed among 110 participants (10 native and 100 nonnative English speakers), engaging them in addressing the speech acts to interlocutors of lower, equal, and higher social statuses with intimate or strange distance. Results indicated that despite having a high command of English, the learners showed deficiencies in the use of (im)politeness strategies that may call for the inclusion of such strategies in EFL instruction programs.

Keywords: Awareness; Pragmatics; (Im)politeness Strategy; Request; Apology; Refusal; Iranian EFL Learners

1. Introduction

Appreciation and production of speech acts demand for sociocultural and sociolinguistic knowledge. (In)adequacy and/or (in)efficiency of either of these kinds of knowledge may result in pragmatic success and/or pragmatic failure. Thomas (1983) refers to pragmatic failure as inability to recognize correct and/or incorrect or polite and/or impolite behavior. As such, language use awareness is fundamental in order to manage communication actions appropriately. It is even

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more substantial for language learners because they should be aware of cross-cultural differences to avoid pragmatic failure.

Due to such importance, the present study aimed to investigate Iranian English learners' awareness of (im)politeness strategies in performing three speech acts of request, apology, and refusal. Stressing the target, the present study sought to specifically discover awareness of English-culture speech acts. Earlier research merely aimed at eliciting EFL learners' knowledge of speech acts not heeding confident of responses provided in terms of attitudinal ratings of appropriateness nor taking (im)politeness mannerism into account.

To efficiently meet the purposes of the study, Brown and Levinson's (1987) three social variables of distance, power, and imposition in politeness studies, as well as Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984), Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989), and Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz's (1990) rationales were taken into consideration on the grounds that (1) labeling the speeches makes qualitative and quantitative analyses more manageable, (2) establishing a realization pattern facilitates inquiry into similarities and differences for supportive moves across languages. We also took advantage of Spencer-Oatey's (2008) face and rapport management model. The study set out to answer three research questions:

1. To what extent are EFL learners aware of (im)politeness strategies?
2. What is the effect of language proficiency on using (im)politeness strategies?
3. What is the effect of gender on using (im)politeness strategies?

1.1 Background

Communicative competence refers to the knowledge and ability to use language. Bachman (1990) branches it into organizational and pragmatic competence. The former consists of grammatical and textual competence, whereas the latter includes sociolinguistic and illocutionary competence. The key suggestion of the model is defining language ability as an interaction between linguistic and contextual knowledge. Spencer-Oatey (2008) features inclusive keys are communication perception and production of messages, linguistic and/or nonlinguistic, which are made on previous schematic experiences and correct match with the context in view of cultural conventions. Thus, a successful interactant is one that has a careful consideration of these rules; otherwise, communication failure may occur. Hence, pragmatic competence has come under the spotlight of many recent studies.

Analyzing cultural and strategic phenomena like (im)politeness is not inherent in a language. As a matter of fact, they are created as a result of various

contextual factors during communicative actions. Hence context and contextual factors are determining elements. Taguchi (2015) introduces three contexts in which recent pragmatic research occurs: (1) the target language community, (2) formal classroom environment, (3) digitally mediated contexts. The point is far from negligence that contexts are built up through interaction and communication. Isurin, Furman, and White (2015) suggest that communication failure “often leads to broken relationships, hurt feelings, culture shock, and diplomatic failure” (p. 38). This witnesses more emphasis on awareness raising of pragmatic domain. As such, (im)politeness and face as the central issues have been contended to play a vital role in this regard.

Face is well-known as the public self-image that everyone frames for himself or herself. Brown and Levinson's (1987) approach is based on the assumption that face may be damaged, maintained or enhanced through interaction. They identified two orientations of positive face, a desire that others accept you as a friend and a member of the group, and negative face, a desire to be respected by others and be free from unreasonable impositions from others. In this vein, they state conversation is a constant care of face-saving act (FSA) and face-threatening act (FTA). In their belief, (im)politeness is inherent in language.

In later studies, postmodern researchers (Culpeper, 2005; Culpeper, Bousfield, & Wichmann, 2003; Eelen, 2001; Mills, 2003; Spencer-Oatey, 2005; Watts, 2003) argue that classical (im)politeness investigations (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Lakoff, 1973; Leech, 1983) have ignored paralinguistic and extralinguistic motifs in (im)politeness conceptions and criticize that grammatical realization is inadequate and cannot respond to the fluidity of context and cross-cultural questions. What merits the model over Brown and Levinson's (1987) is that messages are not intrinsically (im)polite but participants coconstruct the meaning through conversation.

In general, Spencer-Oatey (2008) expresses that speech act sets consist of a head act and a pre or postadditional component with the aim of downgrading or upgrading forces. Kasper (1992) sets up an eleven-fold classification of illocutionary speech acts: requests, suggestions, invitations, refusals, expressions of disagreement, corrections, complaints, apologies, expressions of gratitude, compliments, and indirect answers. The present study suffices to define request, apology, and refusal speech acts.

Request is one of the main tools used by the speaker to stop the hearer or get him or her to carry out an act with the ultimate aim of satisfying wants. A request speech act has two parts of obligatory, core or head and peripheral or additional part. In contrast to the request which may accompany social disharmony (Brown & Levinson, 1987), apology is an end to a disharmony. It is a response to

the feelings of guilt and remorse in which the person is either the recipient or producer of the speech act. The last term which is refusal has been defined as saying no in response to an offerer.

In this regard, several studies have been conducted on the matters to explicate them more. In a contrastive study, Jalilifar (2009) tried to compare Iranian EFL learners with Australian English native speakers. The obtained results of the study presented an imbalance use of patterns in comparison with native speakers. In contrast to high proficient learners who overused indirect forms of request strategies, low proficient learners overused direct forms. This evidenced that learners resorted to overgeneralization.

In an investigation, Eslami-Rasekh and Mardani (2010) analyzed the effect of explicit teaching on a cross-cultural analysis of apology speech act. Their results indicated that, in general, EFL learners are not aware of sociopragmatic elements. Besides, Allami and Naeimi (2010) established a cross-linguistic study of refusals to compare the frequency, shift, and content of semantic formulae employed by Persian native speakers, EFL learners, and American native speakers. In total, the study indicated EFL learners were not aware of the refusal speech act and tended to pave the communicative ways through transfer.

In line with previous studies, Salmani-Nodoushan and Allami (2011) investigated request supportive moves and found out that based on the weightiness and seriousness of the situations, the participants decided about the type and number of moves. In addition, to fill lack of knowledge, the Iranian EFL learners transferred indirect strategies. In line with their analysis on request speech act, Allami (2012) conducted an investigation on offer speech act. The collected data indicated that they had employed indirect strategies to lessen the imposition on the addressee.

In a similar study, the main objective of the study by Ahmadi, Kargar, and Rostampour (2014) was to investigate the types of suggestion supportive moves that Iranian EFL learners used in the target language. The results represented that there were no significant differences among students with different proficiency levels in the application of suggestion strategies. In addition, in a groundbreaking study, Buchbinder, Wilbur, McLean, and Sleath (2015) extended request strategies to medical contexts to investigate patients' expressions of request for painkillers. They put forward direct, indirect, and no request patterns and they employed mitigation strategies, softening devices, and indirect utterances in requesting pain killers. In general, Kádár and Haugh (2015) identified three ways of data gathering in (im)politeness studies: First, written sources which rely on linguistic forms analysis; second, metaparticipants with online evaluation of (im)politeness; and third, face-to-face conversations without evaluation.

The present study is different from its predecessors in that it was an attempt to investigate (1) native and nonnatives codification of request, apology, and refusal speech act patterns, (2) attitudinal ratings of supportive moves in terms of appropriateness, (3) determination of (im)politeness rating scales with regard to the simulated context.

2. Methodology

2.1 Participants

The total participant pool was 110, including 100 nonnative and 10 native English speakers. The purpose of the study called for working with an equal number of male and female Iranian EFL learners to assess the possible effect of gender on the application of strategies. They were at intermediate and high levels of language proficiency. Their age ranged from 17 to 51 years with a mean of 34. They had no experience of living in an English country, so they were homogenous in that they were not exposed to foreign cultures. To obtain a valid form of answer, 10 American native speakers of English (5 males and 5 females) whose age ranged from 23 to 51 ($M = 37$) were selected. They were educated at M.A. and Ph.D. levels, and their answers were obtained via e-mail. They provided responses about the appropriate application of strategies besides giving relevant cross-cultural examination of the speech acts.

2.2 Instruments

Two sets of instruments were used to carry out the data collection procedures. They were designed to gather necessary information about the grammatical knowledge and pragmatic knowledge background of the participants. In this regard, research data were gleaned through an Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT) and a discourse completion test (DCT) to obtain the required information for the current study. The assumption of the homogeneity of students' language proficiency level in each group was satisfied by checking the results obtained from the OQPT. All the EFL learners went through the test before taking any other test. The allocated time was 30 min and its maximum score was 60.

The second administered test was a DCT. This is a common procedure in pragmatics-based research particularly in examining speech acts production. Kasper (2000) suggests it is the most prominent way of pragmalinguistic and linguistic data elicitation. The written open-ended part of the present DCT included 18 real situations. For every speech act, six scenarios were designed to take Brown and Levinson's (1987) social variables (i.e., power and social distance) into consideration. Power has three status of high, equal, and low; social distance involves strange and intimate relations; hence, six scenarios were provided.

It should be mentioned that the scenarios were modified versions used earlier by Allami and Naeimi (2010), Jalilifar (2009), Kuhl and Jadidi (2012), and Tajeddin and Pirhoseinloo (2012). The minor modifications were made to make the questionnaire appropriate in terms of controlling the intended variables to this study. The questionnaire was analyzed quantitatively through Cronbach's alpha and qualitatively by two English native speakers besides two English teachers. Based on the information obtained, it was verified that the selected questions were obvious and left no doubt in terms of content and structures.

Furthermore, the goal of the study was fulfilled by adding two further questions of confidence test and (im)politeness mannerism test. Confidence test involved a scale of 0, 25, 50, 75, and 100% with high reliability ($r = .965$). The test followed five main purposes:

- To identify the learners' attitudinal ratings of their produced structures in terms of pragmatic success
- To cast the learners' mind back to the answers made and encourage them to contemplate the questions and responses more
- To avoid any guess that might arise as a result of surface reading of the questions
- To challenge the participants' mind to think about their sociolinguistic ability as well as grammatical ability
- To demonstrate that language knowledge was not confined to the confidence in grammatical competence but speech acts knowledge was equally important

In the final analysis, to have quantitative analyses of the awareness issue, the native speakers' confidence ratings were considered as 100% and those of nonnative speakers' were measured against them. In other words, the questionnaire distributed among the native speakers did not have confidence test rating—the second question. In order to satisfy the targets of the project, (im)politeness rates of the produced patterns were determined. As such, it required another part which was entitled (im)politeness mannerism test. Thus, the third question of the study was formed based on a five-rated Likert scale rating *from very impolite to very polite*, which was designed after each scenario. The important point is that the reliability of this test had come under notification and the results showed that the Cronbach's alpha value was high ($r = .889$). This part served three essential purposes:

- To determine the extent to which the learners' ratings of their responses matched the pragmatic values of native-like structures

- To determine the extent to which the learners were aware of the (im)politeness strategies in communicative acts
- To assess the speakers' consideration of politeness to the semantic patterns

In summary, to investigate the Iranian EFL learners' pragmatic awareness, the following assumptions were taken into consideration. Firstly, the EFL learners' speech act patterns were representative of their pragmatic awareness. In other words, any deviations from the native-like semantic formulae were indicative of the absence of full pragmatic competence in applying strategies. Secondly, in the case of confidence rating, any answer evidenced the learners' attitude in expressing the speech acts. Thirdly, (im)politeness mannerism held the idea about the pragmatic values, specifically awareness, of (im)politeness strategies.

2.3 Data Collection Procedure

To check the learners' language proficiency level, one point was allocated to each OQPT question, so the total number of correct answers for each student was calculated out of 60. According to the OQPT cut-off score, the learners whose scores ranged from 30 to 60 were considered as appropriate participants for the purpose of this study. In order to have a sound analysis of native and nonnative English speakers' DCT data, the requests, apologies, and refusals produced were codified into strategies based on the taxonomy of semantic formulae (Beebe et al. 1990; Blum-Kulka et al. 1989; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984). Codifying the speech acts into formulae followed three prominent advantages: qualifying the data, quantifying the data, and freeing the researcher from possible bias in descriptive analysis.

To meet the aim of confidence test and (im)politeness mannerism test, the responses employed by the nonnative speakers were analyzed and measured against those of the natives and the percentages to each question were fed into SPSS software separately for analysis.

3. Results

The frequency of the participants' responses in applying each code was counted separately. It should be noted that choosing each code refers to the actual answer of the participants which is representative of their sociocultural awareness. To make judgments about the collected samples, descriptive statistics enable measurement through mean and frequency. In order to meet the target of the study, the distribution of each supportive move was counted in a careful manner and then listed in three tables. The horizontal row of the table presents the statistical population, which is divided into five groups of participants. The vertical column

specifies the distribution of the formulae, and the content of the table elaborates the frequency. To keep a meticulous record of the request speech act, Table 1 makes the comparison more palpable:

Table 1 *Frequency and Shift of Semantic Formulae in Request Speech Act (Situations 1 to 6)*

| Respondents | | Formula | Question | Mood desirable | Want statement | Query preparatory | Strong hint | Grounder | Imposition indicator | Pre-see strategy | Appreciation | Conformity strategy | Getting a pre-commitment | Apologetic | Play-down | Conditional | Embedding | Understate | Demonstrate | Consultative device | Address term | Phrase filler | Politeness marker | Reason |
|--|---|---------|----------|----------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------|----------|----------------------|------------------|--------------|---------------------|--------------------------|------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|------------|-------------|---------------------|--------------|---------------|-------------------|--------|
| 25 EFL intermediate male To the request DCT | S | H | 1 | 10 | 3 | 12 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 14 | 0 |
| | S | E | 3 | 0 | 0 | 23 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 7 | 0 |
| | S | L | 2 | 0 | 0 | 20 | 0 | 4 | 7 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 4 | 0 | 9 | 0 |
| | I | H | 4 | 22 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 7 | 5 |
| | I | E | 6 | 10 | 0 | 15 | 0 | 5 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 6 | 0 |
| | I | L | 5 | 2 | 0 | 10 | 7 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 12 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 7 | 0 | 5 | 1 |
| Total | | | | 44 | 3 | 83 | 8 | 10 | 11 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 33 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 7 | 28 | 0 | 51 | 6 | |
| 25 EFL intermediate female To the request DCT | S | H | 1 | 4 | 0 | 19 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 12 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 12 | 0 | |
| | S | E | 3 | 1 | 0 | 16 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 8 | 0 |
| | S | L | 2 | 0 | 0 | 22 | 0 | 11 | 4 | 3 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 12 | 0 |
| | I | H | 4 | 17 | 0 | 8 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 3 | 4 |
| | I | E | 6 | 5 | 0 | 18 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 4 | 0 |
| | I | L | 5 | 2 | 0 | 14 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 14 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 6 | 0 | 12 | 0 |
| Total | | | | 29 | 0 | 97 | 6 | 17 | 11 | 6 | 0 | 5 | 4 | 31 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 3 | 0 | 2 | 28 | 0 | 51 | 4 |
| 25 EFL advanced male To the request DCT | S | H | 1 | 3 | 0 | 17 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 15 | 0 |
| | S | E | 3 | 0 | 0 | 23 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 7 | 0 |
| | S | L | 2 | 0 | 0 | 18 | 0 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 8 | 0 | 4 | 7 | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| | I | H | 4 | 19 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 9 | 3 |
| | I | E | 6 | 2 | 0 | 17 | 0 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 2 |
| | I | L | 5 | 2 | 0 | 10 | 7 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 12 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 7 | 0 | 5 | 1 |
| Total | | | | 26 | 0 | 91 | 7 | 10 | 8 | 7 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 31 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 9 | 0 | 9 | 23 | 0 | 42 | 6 |
| 25 EFL advanced female To the request DCT | S | H | 1 | 4 | 0 | 19 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 12 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 12 | 0 | |
| | S | E | 3 | 1 | 0 | 16 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 8 | 0 |
| | S | L | 2 | 0 | 0 | 22 | 0 | 11 | 4 | 3 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 12 | 0 |
| | I | H | 4 | 17 | 0 | 8 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 3 | 4 |
| | I | E | 6 | 5 | 0 | 18 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 4 | 0 |
| | I | L | 5 | 2 | 0 | 14 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 14 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 6 | 0 | 12 | 0 |
| Total | | | | 29 | 0 | 97 | 6 | 17 | 11 | 6 | 0 | 5 | 4 | 31 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 3 | 0 | 2 | 28 | 0 | 51 | 4 |
| 10 native Americans To the request DCT | S | H | 1 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 9 | 0 |
| | S | E | 3 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 2 | 0 | |
| | S | L | 2 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 8 | 5 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| | I | H | 4 | 8 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 5 | 3 |
| | I | E | 6 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 7 | 2 |
| | I | L | 5 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 2 |
| Total | | | | 8 | 0 | 43 | 1 | 11 | 7 | 11 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 15 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 6 | 1 | 15 | 1 | 26 | 7 |

Note: H= High-Status Speaker, E= Equal-Status Speaker, L= Low-Status Speaker, S= Strange Distance, I= Intimate Distance

Table 1 shows that the highest frequency among the groups belongs to the query preparatory formula which is a specific form of conventionally indirect

strategy. In this strategy, the request is expressed in a question form through modal verbs (e.g., *can*, *could*, *would*, *may*, etc.). As an example,

- Question # 3: You and your classmate would like to take a photo together to remember this happy moment. You decide to ask a nearby male/female student who is stranger to you, to do this favor. What will you say?

The answers were *would you take a picture of us?* or *could you take a picture of us?* In terms of content, what distinguished the intermediate from the advanced learners was the application of the modal types. The advanced learners applied politer forms of modal verbs like *would* and *could* but the intermediate learners employed less polite forms like *can* or *may*, however, the difference in performance was not significant. Based on chi-square goodness of fit, there was no significant difference among the learners, [$\chi^2(3, n = 368) = 1.43, p = .69$].

According to the table, the second highest frequency belongs to the mood derivable formula. It refers to an imperative mood which is expressed in an authoritative manner. The learners employed it in situations with higher-status strange or intimate distance, whereas English native speakers utilized the strategy just in high-status intimate situations. This indicated that the shift of frequency among the learners was higher than the natives.

- Question # 4: You are studying at home. Your younger brother opens the window and the cold wind blows right into your face and bothers you. You want to ask him to close it. What will you say?

Most of the respondents answered *close the window*. Taking a closer look, chi-square goodness of fit test did not show a significant difference among the learners, [$\chi^2(3, n = 128) = 6.18, p = .10$]. In addition, the general conclusion testified that the Iranians applied a greater amount of imperatives as measured against the Americans. Although the learners were different in terms of proficiency level and gender, the comparison of the findings based on the chi-square goodness of fit testified to no significant difference in their performances ($p > .05$). The nonsignificant interaction in terms of request suggests that the advanced learners had a performance similar to the intermediates, and the male learners performed much like the female learners. When the learners' performance is compared with the English natives, the Iranians mostly underused or overused the formulae in comparison with the English native speakers. The second speech act is apology, which comprised questions 7 to 12 (see Table 2):

Table 2 Frequency and Shift of Semantic Formulae in Apology Speech Act (Situations 7 to 12)

2

Frequency and Shift of Semantic Formulae in Apology Speech Act (Situations 7 to 12)

| Respondents | | Formula | | Question | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|-------|---------|----|----------|------------|------------|--------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| | | | | IFID | Adverbials | Requestion | Extraneous apology | S expresses trait of self-deficiency | Explicit self-blame | Explanation or account of cause | Offer of repair | Concern for the hearer | Address term | Pause filler |
| 25 EFL intermediate male To the request DCT | S | H | 7 | 6 | 19 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 15 | 0 | 1 | 6 |
| | S | E | 9 | 14 | 9 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 2 | 10 | 1 | 5 |
| | S | L | 8 | 10 | 12 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 13 | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| | I | H | 10 | 15 | 6 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 14 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| | I | E | 12 | 9 | 12 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 13 | 0 | 1 | 8 |
| | I | L | 11 | 11 | 10 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 8 |
| | Total | | | 65 | 68 | 3 | 2 | 9 | 10 | 14 | 57 | 10 | 11 | 32 |
| 25 EFL intermediate female To the request DCT | S | H | 7 | 4 | 20 | 1 | 0 | 8 | 1 | 3 | 10 | 0 | 5 | 0 |
| | S | E | 9 | 10 | 10 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 9 | 2 | 8 | 6 | 0 |
| | S | L | 8 | 9 | 13 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 8 | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| | I | H | 10 | 10 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 6 | 13 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| | I | E | 12 | 6 | 18 | 0 | 4 | 7 | 1 | 0 | 9 | 0 | 5 | 1 |
| | I | L | 11 | 14 | 8 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 14 | 3 | 5 | 3 |
| | Total | | | 53 | 76 | 7 | 7 | 24 | 10 | 23 | 56 | 11 | 25 | 5 |
| 25 EFL advanced male To the request DCT | S | H | 7 | 4 | 18 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 16 | 0 | 7 | 1 |
| | S | E | 9 | 8 | 14 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 0 | 12 | 8 | 0 |
| | S | L | 8 | 11 | 12 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 6 | 1 | 14 | 0 | 3 | 2 |
| | I | H | 10 | 11 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 5 | 2 | 8 | 1 | 6 | 7 |
| | I | E | 12 | 8 | 14 | 0 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 12 | 0 | 5 | 2 |
| | I | L | 11 | 7 | 14 | 3 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 15 | 5 |
| | Total | | | 49 | 82 | 5 | 10 | 19 | 15 | 14 | 60 | 13 | 44 | 17 |
| 25 EFL advanced female To the request DCT | S | H | 7 | 11 | 15 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 16 | 0 | 3 | 7 |
| | S | E | 9 | 12 | 14 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 12 | 0 | 7 | 2 | 11 |
| | S | L | 8 | 8 | 18 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 10 | 7 | 12 | 0 | 4 | 3 |
| | I | H | 10 | 32 | 7 | 1 | 2 | 7 | 4 | 4 | 10 | 0 | 5 | 3 |
| | I | E | 12 | 8 | 12 | 1 | 4 | 9 | 4 | 1 | 10 | 0 | 5 | 6 |
| | I | L | 11 | 12 | 15 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 15 | 0 | 4 | 15 |
| | Total | | | 83 | 81 | 6 | 11 | 24 | 21 | 26 | 63 | 7 | 23 | 45 |
| 10 native Americans To the request DCT | S | H | 7 | 0 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 9 | 0 | 3 | 2 |
| | S | E | 9 | 3 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 1 | 5 | 0 | 5 |
| | S | L | 8 | 1 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 7 | 1 | 2 | 0 |
| | I | H | 10 | 4 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 7 | 0 | 2 | 1 |
| | I | E | 12 | 0 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 0 | 8 | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| | I | L | 11 | 1 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 10 | 5 | 3 | 6 |
| | Total | | | 9 | 45 | 0 | 0 | 9 | 8 | 19 | 42 | 11 | 11 | 17 |

Note. H= High-Status Speaker, E= Equal-Status Speaker, L= Low-Status Speaker, S= Strange Distance, I= Intimate Distance

According to Table 2, the learners' performance in some formulae (e.g., IFID, S expresses trait of self-deficiency, address term, and pause filler) is significant ($p < .05$), suggesting a difference among the four groups of learners. In IFID, adverbial, S expresses trait of self-deficiency, explicit self-blame, offer of repair, address term, and pause filler the advanced learners frequency of performance slightly precede the intermediate ones. The comparative study evidences the two most frequent supportive moves are adverbials and illocutionary force indicating device (IFID), respectively. Adverbials are a type of intensifications and are known through the qualifiers of *very*, *so*, and *really*. Table 2 shows that the advanced learners ($M = 81.5$) employed adverbials more than the intermediate

learners ($M = 72$) although the difference was not significant, [$\chi^2(3, n = 307) = 1.59, p = .66$].

The second largest value belongs to IFID which refers to the formulaic expressions of regret (i.e., *sorry, excuse, apologize, forgive, regret, and pardon*). Accordingly, the mean score of the intermediate learners ($M = 59$) was less than that of the advanced learners ($M = 66$). Generally, the learners did not have a specific pattern in using IFID and the shift of frequency among them was high, although this occurrence among the English native speakers was more controlled.

- Question # 10: You borrow the car of your younger brother. When you are backing out of the parking place, you accidentally bump into a tree and make dent on the side of the car. You feel terrible about it. How do you apologize?
- Answer: *I'm sorry I dented your car.*

The results of the chi-square showed there was a significant difference among the learners, [$\chi^2(3, n = 250) = 11.18, p = .01$]. In addition, the comparison between adverbials ($M = 70.4$) and IFID ($M = 51.8$) demonstrated that both the native and nonnative groups had more tendency towards the application of the former strategy rather than the latter one. The results of the frequency report that this strategy is not as common among the natives (5.3%) as among the learners (19.45%). In fact, one noteworthy difference occurs in the application of IFID and offer of repair. The EFL learners normally use a greater proportion of IFID semantic formula per response than the native speakers of English. The most frequent strategy used by the English speakers (17%) is providing offer of repair. Truly, the English apologizers assume offer of repair is the best way of expressing regret. In this prominent case, Iranians' performance (15.82%) is not similar to that of the English. In addition, the results displayed that instead of attaching an alternative or additional to IFID, Iranians repeat apologetic formulae like extreme apology and repetition, whereas this is not the case among the natives. To provide an account for refusal speech act, the supportive moves were counted and tabulated in a careful manner (see Table 3):

Table 3 Frequency and Shift of Semantic Formulae in Request Speech Act (Situations 13 to 18)

3

| Respondents | | Formula | | Frequency and Shift of Semantic Formulae in Refusal Speech Act (Situations 13 to 18) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|---|---------|----|--|---------------------|---|---------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|---|--------------------------------|------------|----------------|---------|--------------|
| | | | | Question | Non-performative/No | Non-performative negative willingness/ability | Statement of regret | Statement of wish | Excuse/reason/explanation | Statement of alternative | Set condition for future refusal | Promise of future acceptance | Statement of principle | Final or statement of negative consequences | Consider the request expensive | Politeness | Applausiveness | Empathy | Address form |
| 25 EFL intermediate male To the request DCT | S | H | 13 | 4 | 13 | 8 | 1 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| | S | E | 15 | 2 | 0 | 15 | 1 | 20 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| | S | L | 14 | 0 | 1 | 23 | 1 | 20 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| | I | H | 16 | 2 | 7 | 6 | 2 | 7 | 1 | 0 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 6 | 0 | 0 |
| | I | E | 18 | 9 | 3 | 10 | 0 | 12 | 4 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| | I | L | 17 | 0 | 1 | 16 | 3 | 17 | 1 | 0 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| Total | | | 17 | 25 | 78 | 8 | 82 | 6 | 0 | 24 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 9 | 6 | 7 | 3 | |
| 25 EFL intermediate female To the request DCT | S | H | 13 | 2 | 10 | 14 | 2 | 11 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| | S | E | 15 | 1 | 4 | 19 | 0 | 17 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | |
| | S | L | 14 | 0 | 1 | 23 | 1 | 20 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | |
| | I | H | 16 | 0 | 19 | 4 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| | I | E | 18 | 9 | 7 | 7 | 0 | 12 | 6 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| | I | L | 17 | 0 | 3 | 19 | 7 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 | |
| Total | | | 12 | 44 | 86 | 10 | 78 | 6 | 1 | 16 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 11 | 0 | 4 | 4 | | |
| 25 EFL advanced male To the request DCT | S | H | 13 | 3 | 10 | 12 | 2 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 6 | 0 | 1 | 1 | |
| | S | E | 15 | 1 | 3 | 19 | 2 | 17 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | |
| | S | L | 14 | 0 | 1 | 23 | 1 | 20 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | |
| | I | H | 16 | 0 | 18 | 11 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| | I | E | 18 | 2 | 4 | 16 | 0 | 16 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| | I | L | 17 | 1 | 3 | 17 | 9 | 18 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 4 | |
| Total | | | 7 | 39 | 98 | 15 | 82 | 2 | 1 | 15 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 9 | 6 | | |
| 25 EFL advanced female To the request DCT | S | H | 13 | 1 | 14 | 11 | 0 | 9 | 1 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 5 | 1 | 0 | 1 | |
| | S | E | 15 | 0 | 4 | 20 | 3 | 20 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | |
| | S | L | 14 | 0 | 4 | 17 | 3 | 20 | 2 | 0 | 8 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | |
| | I | H | 16 | 0 | 14 | 8 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 8 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 13 | 0 | |
| | I | E | 18 | 1 | 5 | 13 | 1 | 18 | 7 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | |
| | I | L | 17 | 0 | 3 | 17 | 3 | 20 | 2 | 0 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 2 | |
| Total | | | 2 | 44 | 86 | 10 | 91 | 12 | 6 | 34 | 6 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 14 | 5 | 7 | | |
| 10 native Americans To the request DCT | S | H | 13 | 0 | 6 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| | S | E | 15 | 0 | 3 | 7 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | |
| | S | L | 14 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 10 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 3 | |
| | I | H | 16 | 0 | 7 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 3 | 0 | 0 | |
| | I | E | 18 | 0 | 0 | 7 | 0 | 8 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| | I | L | 17 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 2 | 9 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| Total | | | 0 | 16 | 34 | 4 | 33 | 10 | 2 | 16 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 10 | 0 | 3 | | |

Note. H= High-Status Speaker, E= Equal-Status Speaker, L= Low-Status Speaker, S= Strange Distance, I= Intimate Distance

Multiple answers were given to the six kinds of refusal situations. The most common semantic formulae applied by the Iranian EFL learners with regard to the power and social distance variables are statement of regret (30.07%) and excuse/reason/explanation (28.72%). Although all the participants displayed a considerable level of indirectness, there were also signs of application of direct strategies (i.e., nonperformative statement no and negative willingness/ability). The results indicated that the English native speakers (0%) do not refuse an offer directly

through performative no strategy but the learners (3.42%) normally use it. In other words, the learners seemed to be unaware that the English people do not usually answer directly negatively in response to an offer. The inappropriate application was especially common among the intermediate learners.

Besides, based on the chi-square goodness of fit the learners performed significantly ($p < .05$) in applying formulae like performative no, set condition for future or past, promise of future acceptance, and postponement, which meant that the learners' group performances were different from one another. In applying some of the strategies (e.g., nonperformative, statement of wish and promise of future acceptance) the advanced learners slightly preceded the intermediate respondents. It meant that the former group applied these moves more than the latter group.

The chi-square test for independence was applied among the two categorical variables of group (i.e., male intermediate, female intermediate, male advanced, and female advanced) and move type and the continuous variable of frequency. The Pearson correlation value ($p = .0001$) for request was significant and the result showed that there was an association between group and the selection of request move type, [$\chi^2(76) = 1.729, p \leq 0.05$]. The value of the Cramer's V is .181, which reported a moderate effect size.

The Pearson chi-square value was significant ($p = .0001$) and the examination of the data indicated that there was an association between group and move type, [$\chi^2(40) = 1.241, p \leq 0.05$]. Based on the Cramer's V value (.146), the effect size was small. Besides, the Pearson chi-square value was reported significant ($p = .0001$) for refusal speech act. The explanation was that the impact of group on supportive moves is significant, [$\chi^2(60) = 1.379, p \leq 0.05$]. In addition, the effect size is small (Cramer's V = .16).

In sum, the results of chi-square tests for request, apology, and refusal speech act were significant, which meant that there was an association between group (i.e., male intermediate, female intermediate, male advanced, and female advanced) and the selection of request move type.

A two-way between groups ANOVA was conducted to measure the mean differences between the two independent variables of group (i.e., intermediate, advanced, and English native speakers) and gender. The central focus of the intended SPSS technique was to understand if there existed any interaction between the two independent variables on the dependent variables (i.e., attitudinal appropriateness and (im)politeness mannerism). The results indicate that the intermediate learners ($M = 70.58, SD = 12.94$) were more confident of their responses than the advanced learners ($M = 70.19, SD = 18.60$). Besides, based on the

Levene's test, the result of descriptive statistics on confidence test was significant, $F(5, 104) = 6.79, p = .0001$.

Moreover, language proficiency affected the appropriateness response but gender did not. Furthermore, gender did not moderate the relationship between group and appropriateness, $F(1, 104) = .23, p = .632$, partial eta squared = .002. However, group moderated the relationship between gender and appropriateness, $F(2, 104) = 16.70, p = .0001$, partial eta squared = .243. Also, the result of the interaction was not significant and the effect size was low, $F(2, 104) = .364, p = .696$, partial eta squared = .007.

Concerning the (im)politeness mannerism test, the relationship between the intermediate and native participants as well as the relationship between the advanced and native speakers was significant ($p = .0001$). The total mean and standard deviation of the intermediate, advanced, and native participants were ($M = 3.55, SD = .47$), ($M = 3.70, SD = .44$), and ($M = 3.86, SD = .26$), respectively. It testified that the participants' mean score differences were very low. In addition, the value of the Levene's test was not significant ($p = .355$).

Also, the results indicated that the effect of gender on (im)politeness test was not significant, and the partial eta squared value indicated a low effect size, $F(1, 104) = .67, p = .41$, partial eta squared = .006, and $p > .05$. The group's report is, $F(2, 104) = 2.58, p = .08$, partial eta squared = .04. Therefore, the effect of group on mannerism was not significant ($p > .05$), and the effect size was low. A further important point was that gender and group interaction output was $F(2, 104) = .007, p = .99$, partial eta squared = .0001, and $p > .05$, indicating that the interaction had no effect on mannerism.

The relationship between the intermediate and native participants was significant ($p < .05$), but the relationship between the advanced and native speakers was not significant ($p > .05$). Next, because the DCT's scenarios were organized into two social distances and three power statuses, six various contexts (i.e., high-status strange speaker, equal-status strange interlocutors, low-status strange speaker, high-status intimate speaker, equal-status intimate speaker, and low-status intimate speaker) came under study. To this end, six correlation tests were designed based on the six situations. The results of the analyses based on the various scenarios in terms of power and social distance were significant ($p < .05$), meaning that the more confident the participants were in answering the appropriateness percentages, the politer their response to the (im)politeness mannerism could be.

ANOVA was used to determine whether there were any significant differences in the mean scores of the intermediate, advanced, and English native speakers. The results indicated that the highest mean score belonged to the native

speakers ($M = 3.86$, $SD = .26$), then to the advanced learners ($M = 3.70$, $SD = .44$), and the lowest one to the intermediate learners ($M = 3.55$, $SD = .47$). Further, the value was not significant, $F(2, 107) = 2.63$, $p = .07$.

Two different independent samples t tests were conducted to check the effect of language proficiency level and gender on (im)politeness strategies. The statistical test aimed to determine any possible differences between the advanced and intermediate learners as well as the male and female participants on pragmatic awareness. The results indicated the difference between the two proficiency levels did not turn out to be statistically significant, ($t = 1.602$, $p = .505$, $df = 97.469$). The magnitude of difference in the mean scores was small (eta squared = .025). The finding was evidence to the claim that the learners had similar performance in responding to the speech acts.

The results of the second test indicated that the difference between the male and female participants was not significant, ($t = .986$, $p = .138$, $df = 104.248$). The noteworthy point is that gender was not an influential factor in producing appropriate formulaic expressions in response to the intended speech acts.

4. Discussion

The general aim of this study was to examine the Iranian EFL learners' awareness of (im)politeness strategies. The results indicate that the learners seemed unaware of the frequency of the strategies in request, apology, and refusal speech acts. In fact, the strategies common between both English native speakers and Iranian EFL learners manifested some differences. An example is the mood derivable formula as a striking move in requests. The application of the mood derivable formula was frequent among the learners in various contextual circumstances, whereas it was only observable in requesting high-status intimate speakers among the English natives. Explicating the claim more, the results of the descriptive statistics suggest that IFID and adverbials possessed a high degree of frequency among the natives and nonnatives, though IFID was more common among the learners than the natives. Another prominent example is that the learners were aware of offer of repair strategy, but it was more frequent among the English people than the Iranian learners. It was also found that learners were only slightly aware of the most frequent strategies in refusals (i.e., excuse/reason/explanation, and statement of regret strategies); however, this was not the case for other strategies.

The next notable result is about the content of the speech acts. Comparing the content between the Iranian learners and the English natives showed that the natives alleviated their content of request more than the learners. This is supportable through the high application of query preparatory, modifiers, and so on among the natives. Also, the results of the Iranian learners indicated that in order to fill the gap

of pragmatic knowledge, they attempted to apply the IFID and adverbial formulae repeatedly; however, they neglected the fact that there were other various strategies to express the feeling of regret. Another point is that in the content of offer of repair: Unlike the EFL learners, the English native speakers usually provided a choice for the receiver. For example, they asked *would you prefer it if I do X or Y?*, whereas this was not the case among the Iranian learners. The results showed that the natives brought excuse in more details than the Iranian learners: They attempted to provide reasons through explicating their explanations (e.g., stating the time and/or place). The second difference was in the type of reason. The English native speakers were more explicit in bringing excuses/reasons/explanations, but the Iranian EFL learners were more implicit. English speakers mostly brought appointment as an excuse with giving the time, but the learners did not obviate their excuse; for instance, the EFL learners said *I have work to do and I should go*.

In the request speech act, the learners employed formulae such as mood derivable, query preparatory, apology and address term in almost all the circumstances, without concentrating on the contextual variables; however, the natives took the contextual factors into notice and employed the moves in a controlled manner. Or, in apology speech act, the learners did not follow a specific pattern of use in using the three prominent formulae (i.e., adverbial, IFID, and offer of repair). An example for refusal is that the English speakers' patterns for nonperformative negative willingness/ability were quite consistent, and the highest one was addressed towards intimate high-power speakers, whereas the learners shifted through various contexts. The same case can be addressed for excuse/reason/explanation formulae.

Moreover, this study was an attempt to clarify the effect of language proficiency level on (im)politeness awareness. The statistical results indicated no remarkable sign of priority of a group over another ($p > .05$). This finding was unexpected and suggests that in spite of the full grammatical command, the advanced and the intermediate learners could not handle the various conditions successfully. The results are in contrast with Kuhi and Jadid's (2012) notion that learners have enough knowledge about speech acts and strategies. However, the results of the current study are consistent with those of Jalilifar (2009) and Ahmadi et al. (2014) who found that learners with different language proficiency levels are ignorant of appropriate target language pragmatic schemes. The findings also evidence that group (intermediate, advanced, and English native speakers) plays a significant role in the confidence test. Hence, there is a difference between the intermediate, advanced, and native speakers' percentages in confidence test, whereas the findings of the politeness mannerism test indicated that group had no role in

rating (im)politeness scale. In other words, there was no significant difference among the participants on the mannerism test.

Concerning the effect of gender on (im)politeness strategies, contrary to expectations, this study did not find any significant difference between the males and females Iranian EFL learners ($p > .05$). It highlights that both groups employed nonnative request, apology, and refusal semantic formulae. These results contradict Mills' (2003) claim that females are politer than males, but it is broadly consistent with Ahmadi et al.'s (2014) investigation of speech act. The results also differ from Kuhi and Jadidi's (2012) study that found gender as a cultural variable to have a remarkable effect on selecting strategies. Furthermore, the results showed that gender was not effective on the confidence test responses. Thus, the males and females' assurance of the appropriateness matter was the same.

In terms of face sensitivities, the present study evidences that in applying the request speech act, the respondents attempted to alleviate the FTA of an order or a want through bringing supportive moves like imposition minimizer, appreciation, apology, politeness marker, and so on. In apologizing situations, the producer of the apology employs the strategies like IFID, adverbial intensifications, offer of repair, and so on. Besides, in the refusal speech act, the rejecter uses statement of regret, statement of wish, excuse/reason/explanation, and so on. The common motif based on Spencer-Oatey's (2008) management of face sensitivities is that the moves are employed by the speaker to be evaluated positively from the hearer's point of view and to prevent FTA. With regard to the relational face management, the study met this issue through considering subsets such as strange-intimate distance and equal-unequal power. Further, in social identity management, the requestor, apologizer, and refuser respond with accepting the speaker's social identity and position in relation to himself or herself. In managing the interactional goal, the respondent may enhance maintain, neglect, or challenge the interlocutor's face.

The investigation of requests, apologies, and refusals reveals that the Iranian EFL learners are not aware of appropriate strategies. It suggests that they are not cognizant that a specific speech act may be realized differently across various cultures. It confirms Bardovi-Harling's (2001) idea that the conceptualization and verbalization of speech acts are cross-culturally different. On the whole, the Iranian EFL learners' poor performance can be put down to lack of the sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic conventions (Spencer-Oatey, 2008). Therefore, the conventions could be a major factor, if not the only, causing pragmatic failure.

5. Conclusion

As to the purpose of this study, the Iranian EFL learners' pragmatic awareness in terms of (im)politeness strategies in the request, apology, and refusal

speech acts was checked and three research questions were proposed. The idea behind these questions was to investigate the learners' awareness of the three speech acts, as well as extend of the influence of language proficiency level and gender on (im)politeness awareness. The main reason for studying pragmatic awareness is the fact that there has been no investigation about the Iranian EFL learners' (im)politeness strategies in line with attitudinal and mannerism subject matters. Results from the descriptive and inferential statistics of Iranian EFL learners ascertain that the EFL learners' pragmatic awareness (i.e., their knowledge of how to produce and perceive a language based on the cultural-specific rules of appropriateness) did not follow native-like patterns. Furthermore, the learners' unsatisfactory results in the production of speech acts were a clear-cut indication of their difficulty in the acquisition of the structures.

This study has important explanations for developing cultural awareness. Spencer-Oatey (2008) claims that culture is a set of shared behavioral conventions which shapes the meaning. This indicates that recognizing and producing the meaning of speech acts are culturally determined factors and require high degrees of awareness.

Awareness of speech acts is an important component in pragmatic domain and plays a key role in communication actions. Pragmatic teaching should be an integral part of language learning, especially for EFL who have almost no opportunity for interaction. As such, providing an opportunity for learning the knowledge of the routines or formulaic expressions of speech acts is a solution to internalizing pragmatic knowledge for appropriate spontaneous production. In this vein, to achieve an optimal pragmatic success, EFL learners need to be aware of the frequent sociocultural strategies of the foreign language.

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