

## **Politeness strategies in written communications: the issue of Iranian EFL learners**

**Giti Karimkhanloo<sup>1</sup> & Narges Vaezi<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Zanjan University of Medical Sciences, Iran

<sup>2</sup>Islamic Azad University, Iran  
ghiti@zums.ac.ir

### **Abstract**

The approximation of the pragmatic knowledge of English language learners to native speakers has been a realm of concern for the scholars and researchers in applied linguistics. Thus, this research was an endeavor to figure out the association between the proficiency level and politeness strategies and external/internal modifications in written communication skills in the speech act of requests in Iranian English language learners. To this end, a written Discourse Completion Test (DCT), adapted from Rose (1994), including 8 situations was administered to elicit data from Iran Language Institute 120 female and male EFL learners, 60 upper-intermediate and 60 intermediate. The data were sorted out using Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies taxonomy (Brown and Levinson 1987) and external/internal modifications developed by Faerch and Kasper (1989). The written request utterances provided by each participant were analyzed in terms of frequency and types of politeness strategies, namely, positive, negative, bald on record, and off-record as well as external/internal modifications utilized in requests. The Pearson Chi-Square test results revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between upper-intermediate and intermediate learners' type of politeness strategies and external/internal modifications.

**Keywords:** Pragmatics, Politeness strategies, Proficiency level, Gender, Speech act, written requests

### **1. Introduction**

This research was an endeavor to dissect the relationship between the proficiency level and politeness strategies in written communication skills by Iranian male and female EFL students. To put it in other words, the core concern was to find out any potential associations between female and male students' level of proficiency and the use of politeness strategies in requests based on Brown and Levinson's framework (1987) and external/ internal modifications developed by Faerch and Kasper (1989).

Typically, EFL students apt to employ English based on their own cultural experiences, which in turn, lead to misinterpretations in communication. They sometimes relatively unconsciously come out impolite, unfriendly or even hostile. Hence, to communicate effectively across cultures, learners are often advised to be attentive to the differences of their own culture and the English culture and get acquainted with the politeness strategies as used in daily conversation of native speakers. It is a momentous part in all social interactions (Cohen, 2004).

The sheer bulk of previous research has been carried out on politeness strategies with a focus on verbal communications. Yet, owing to the lack of research in critical consideration of this issue in written communications, there has been a topical penchant towards written contexts as well (for example; Ford, 2003; Lan, 2000; Chen, 2001). Consequently, in research on politeness strategies, written material has found its dominant position to provide a communication context void of conflict between writers on one hand and audience on the other hand.

Myer in 1989 embarked on this issue with publication of his research 'the pragmatics of politeness in scientific articles', which initiated a discernible trend in research on politeness. Toward this end, the present study was in quest of any promising relationships between the application of politeness strategies and language proficiency levels of Iranian EFL learners' written requests.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), second language acquisition has gained a great deal from findings in politeness strategies. Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) infer that assuming ample linguistic competence in second and foreign language apprentices, one cannot take steps to guarantee that efficient and thriving communication of these learners takes place since they may commit mistakes which are indeed originally pragmatic. This idea is asserted when Cohen and Olshtain, 1993 believe that native speakers differ from non-natives in their realizations of speech acts. Hymes and Gumperz (1972) affirm that accuracy and appropriacy are fundamental endowments which must be mastered by the learners in order to achieve communicative objectives. In this sense, pragmatic competence is gazed at as a vital building block over which second language learners are anticipated to have mastery. According to Tanck (2002), grammatically 'fluent' learners can never be alleged to be socially or culturally flourishing speakers, because they ought to have pragmatic competence to generate pragmatically acceptable utterances.

Emphasis on communicative concept in second language learning has augmented the same amount of magnitude to the notion of communicative competence and subsequently, researchers are increasingly recognizing the importance of this aspect of pragmatics in second language learning.

Among other speech acts, such as complaints or criticisms, requesting in written communication has received a lesser amount of attention. As a result, the current research was an attempt to explore the appropriacy and accuracy of requests in Iranian written communications. Brown and Levinson (1987), state that in performing face threatening acts striking consideration must be employed to pick out the most direct and efficient face threatening act on record and to mitigate the upshot of face threatening act (FTA) on the hearers' side (off- record). This assortment of apt strategy is bound to the FTA weight and momentousness.

Making a request among other speech acts dictates both pragmatic and linguistic competence. Accordingly, in requesting, the speech act grows to be face threatening and a communication breakdown usually comes about as the result of ignorance of cultural and social boundaries. This is the reason for failure in communication of second language learners (Scollon, Scollon, and Jones ,2011).

In view of the above standpoints, this study unveils the potential knack of Iranian learners in manipulating politeness strategies over attempting a written Discourse Completion Test (DCT), as the paramount available model to the authentic context. As a result, the following research questions were tackled:

- Q1:** Is there a relationship between the application of politeness strategies in written communication skills and different proficiency levels in Iranian EFL context?
- Q2:** Is there a relationship between the application of external/ internal modifications in written communication skills and different proficiency levels?
- Q3:** Is there a relationship between the application of politeness strategies in written communication skills and different genders in Iranian EFL context?
- Q4:** Is there a relationship between the application of external/ internal modifications in written communication skills and different genders in Iranian EFL context?

On the basis of the research questions, the following hypotheses were formulated as:

- H 1:** Politeness strategies applied by Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners are different from those applied by intermediate learners in written requests.
- H 2:** External/ internal modifications applied by Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners are different from those applied by intermediate learners in written requests.
- H 3:** There is a difference between female and male upper intermediate English language learners in Iran in application of politeness strategies in written requests.

**H 4:** There is a difference between female and male upper intermediate English language learners in Iran in application of External/ internal modifications in written requests.

Adapting the politeness theory of Brown and Levinson (1987), there are five such strategies, classified from the least polite to the most polite. The strategies accessible for a speaker to do a face threatening act are alienated into on record and off record strategies. If the speaker draws on on-record strategy, he may carry out the FTA without redressive action (clearly and baldly) or with redressive action which implies the speaker observes and shields positive face or negative face of the hearer.

**Bald on-record politeness:** Brown and Levinson (1987), hold that once people discern each other or are in situations of urgency, bald on record strategy is applied. While not preserving the face, if separated from the context, this approach may act as face threatening. The assortment of bald on record strategy along with a pattern for each is presented as follows:

- An emergency: Help!
- Task oriented by being imperative: Give money.
- Request without redressing: Give me the nails.
- Alerting by giving a piece of advice or suggestion or threatening: Careful! He is a dangerous man.

**Off-record:** As Brown and Levinson (1987) state, off-record is rather an indirect strategy in the sense that face is not openly threatened and relies on the hearers' deduction of the speaker's intension. The addressee plays the foremost part in the construal of the act. The speaker utters obliquely or says something implied about what the speaker requests that when the addressee hears that may do it for the speaker devoid of any feeling imposed by the speaker. The categories of off-record strategy with a case in point for each are presented in the following part:

- To give hints: I forgot to bring my wallet
- To be vague or ironic: That house needs a touch of paint
- To be sarcastic or joking by overstating or understating: He is a son of Jain Household.

**Positive politeness:** *"This strategy tries to minimize the threat to the audience's positive face. This can be done by attending to the audience's needs, invoking equality and feelings of belonging to the group, hedging or indirectness, avoiding disagreement, using humor and optimism and making offers and promises"* (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In other words, the speaker seeks to be more affable to the

addressee and respects the addressee by acting or speaking about what the addressee desires. Then, the speaker attempts to make the situation to be more comfortable for both of them. It often turns out to happen in a social community such as groups of friends. The typology of positive politeness strategies jointly with an illustration for each are presented as follows:

- Attend to the receiver by giving a reason and offering or showing a concern: You seem to be tired. You have been working for a long time here. Why not have a cup of coffee?
- Avoid disagreement by complimenting: What a fantastic garden you have!
- Assume agreement: Will you tell me about what happened to my son because you are his friend?
- Hedge opinion: You really should try harder.

**Negative politeness:** *"This strategy tries to minimize threats to the audience's negative face. An example of when negative politeness would be used is when the speaker requires something from the audience, but wants to maintain the audience's right to refuse. This can be done by being indirect, using hedges or questions, minimizing imposition and apologizing"* Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 133) . It comes to pass in a rough situation as the consequence of farness between addressee and addresser. The typology associated with negative politeness strategies with an example for each are presented as follows:

- Be indirect by using a question: Can you please pass the salt?
- Forgiveness or apologizing: I want to apologize because ...
- Minimizing imposition by indirect question to show deference: I would like you share your knowledge with me about calligraphy.
- Pluralizing by the responsible side to show deference: We ought to have told you that you had to reserve your meal in the campus two days beforehand.

**External and internal modifications:** Faerch and Kasper (1989), consider requests undergoing two foremost categories of external and internal modifications. While internal modifications are considered as devices to evade direct requesting, external modifications are tokens of optional supportive moves applied prior or posterior to head acts for their modification. Internal modifications maneuver at two levels: lexical and syntactic. Reason, preparatory, disarmers are instances of external modifications. The following illustration briefly elaborates upon both internal and external modification:

- **Internal modifications**

- Lexical

A: Use of mitigators: Pick up the dishes after lunch please, would you?

B: Use of perceptual verbs: We think you might need a help in this hard time of losing your wife.

- Structural

A: In conditional statements : If you don't mind, please lift this box for me.

B: In interrogatives: Can I leave the office sooner?

### • External modifications

- Providing reason: I had many classes and I fell short of time to prepare dinner, would you buy something to eat on your way to home?
- Use of preparatory: I am sure that you know the value of punctuality for me, I have been your student in past three years, and this is the first time I could not finish my project on time. Would you please give me three day extension?
- Use of disarmers: You are famous as a very considerable and nice teacher; would you please give me some more time to finish my project? I am sure you won't say no.
- Use of alerters: I'm afraid, would you pass me that jar, please.
- Suggestive replacements: Please pay attention; I have to attend a formal meeting. I need to leave this session a little bit earlier. Next session we will stay more.
- Use of affirmative politeness strategies: I'd like to know if you can talk to your neighborhood doctor to visit me sooner. My case is urgency. If it is a disturbance, please don't care.

**Speech act:** Studies about speech act are among the fundamental concepts in pragmatics which include orders, requests, apologies and suggestions (Koike, 1989). Each way of performing a speech act encompasses its own diverse social implications (Ervin-Tripp, 1976) and remuneration from worldwide principles of collaboration in conjunction with politeness (Leech, 1983).

**Request:** Trosborg (1995) defines requests as a speech act which belongs to the directive group whereby a speaker permits the audience to carry it out for his or her own benefit.

The most prominent classification of requests strategies is assigned to Brown and Levinson' model of politeness (1987).

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Subjects of the study

The potential subjects for the present research took in all available male and female intermediate and upper-intermediate English language learners at an Iranian language Institute (ILI). Out of 300 students, 150 were selected who were at the age range of 18-25 including 70 upper-intermediate and 80 intermediate students. Each group included equal number of females and males. After the administration of a test namely test of discourse completion or DCT, 120 subjects

were selected. The other subjects were excluded due to their incomplete responses in the questionnaires. The selected subjects were then assigned to two 60-member groups both male and female. Each group comprised 30 intermediate and 30 upper-intermediate students. It is noteworthy that ILI students pass a placement test to enter this institute. Meanwhile, all subjects were classmates for around and over two years at intermediate and upper-intermediate levels respectively, and, hence, could have been considered as linguistically homogeneous at target English proficiency levels. Nevertheless, in order to be pretty confident about subjects' levels, the Nelson Proficiency Test Battery was also run. Table 1 elaborates demographic data of the subjects.

## **2.2. Instruments**

A placement test containing two sets of 50 multiple choice items from Nelson Standardized Test Batteries were administered. To be precise, Nelson tests 300A and 350D were selected and distributed among the subjects to guarantee that they were at the required language proficiency levels, that is, intermediate and upper-intermediate. The passing score, as claimed by the developers of the Nelson tests (Fowler and Norman 1976, p. 13) for the subjects to be tuned to their appropriate level, however, was 30 correct answers out of 50 items (60 %). As expected, the required score was obtained by almost all subjects. Then, a DCT adopted from Rose was administered (Rose, 1994) as the main instrument to examine the variables of the study. It is worth of mentioning that DCTs, while not different from other data elicitation methods, have their own rewards. They yield a large number of responses, are easy to assess and need not be transcribed. Besides, DCTs can have power over an assortment of variables such as gender and status and establish the differences which are intra-linguistically and cross-culturally significant. Another claim, in favor of DCTs, is related to Hill et al. (1986), who pointed out that DCTs are gainful since respondents feel free to put themselves into words devoid of any kind of intervention by the researcher. The dilemma with the role-playing technique, as they anticipated, is that the subjects felt embarrassed when they were asked to role-play a situation.

While brought up the above rewards for the DCTs, the researcher was not unversed in the confines of using a DCT as the primary source of eliciting data. A lack of contextual variation (Rose, 1994; Rose & Ono, 1995), a simplification of complex interactions (Brown & Levinson, 1987), and the hypothetical nature of the situation are among the drawbacks of exploiting DCTs. Moreover, according to Nelson et al. (2002), the utterances of people show a discrepancy in an assumed position compared with authentic situation. However, the other methods of data collection are not without boundaries and pitfalls, either. To name some, problems due to control over gender and status, problems related to the role that memory plays over the process of note taking and last but not least time-consuming nature of data

collection; all of which according to Cohen (1996) are amongst the potential problems and according to Nelson et al (2002) are considered as the pitfalls of the naturalistic data.

### **2.3. Data collection procedure**

As mentioned earlier, this study initiated to probe into the incidence and types of politeness strategies relying on Brown and Levinson's taxonomy at intermediate and upper-intermediate proficiency levels in written requests. Politeness strategies were considered as independent variable and written requests were taken as dependent variable.

To realize this end, two different sorts of questionnaires were administered. In the first stage, to decide on the proficiency level of the participants, Nelson proficiency placement test batteries were given to 150 students studying at ILI and based on their scores (subject's score  $\geq$  60 % of test total score) were divided into two 80 and 70 subject groups at intermediate and upper-intermediate levels. Noteworthy is that each group comprised equal number of female and male subjects.

In the succeeding phase, a DCT was exploited as the prime data elicitation instrument which comprised 8 scenarios for which the subjects were thought to compose a request based on their feedback to the given situation. The DCT questionnaire pronounced situations that subjects of the study might come across throughout their daily life and encompassed their responses to these sceneries in request form. Subsequently, the responses went through analysis in numerous phases. First, improper responses were passed over in DCT, whereas all valid responses were maintained. Over the next phase, the responses were analyzed grounded on politeness strategies of Brown and Levinson's taxonomy and Faerck Kasper's external/internal modifications.

The responses were read scrupulously and embedded inside a respective category. Afterwards, the number of each type of strategy was tallied, and finally the researcher came up with the following total frequency tables. Item by item frequency tables have been dealt with in tables 2, 3, 4, and 5.

### **3. Data analyses procedures**

In order to deal with the research questions and to clasp logical answers to the questions and to figure out if they were generalizable, descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the collected data benefiting from SPSS package. In the descriptive statistics phase, frequency of each politeness strategy and external/internal modifications were calculated. They went through chi-square test statistical analysis for the evaluation of the significance of the differences in politeness strategies and external/internal modification frequencies to figure out if the null hypotheses were nullified.



## **4. Results and discussions**

As pointed out in earlier parts, this study was concerned with investigation of politeness strategies and their use by male and female intermediate and upper-intermediate EFL learners in terms of written requests. The collected data via modified discourse completion test (DCT) were analyzed using SPSS package version 18.

### **4.1. Investigation of hypothesis one**

The first null hypothesis claimed that there would be no statistically meaningful difference in the nature of politeness strategies used by intermediate and upper-intermediate learners. To weigh the value of this hypothesis, the item by item analysis of politeness strategies were probed in terms of proficiency level and gender (Table 6).

By virtue of close consideration of results in the table, in a general sense, politeness strategies were applied 955 times by 120 participants of the study out of which 478 were stated by upper-intermediate group and the remaining 477 by intermediate learners. Four types of politeness strategies used by upper-intermediate learners comprised 166, 217, 71, 24 for positive, negative, bald on record, and off-record strategies, respectively. Whereas, intermediate learners exploited the corresponding strategies in the order of 208, 186, 67, and 16 respectively (See Table 7 and Table 8).

The chi-Square test result, as shown in table 8, revealed significant differences between intermediate and upper-intermediate learners' politeness strategy use, at least in one type; hence, the findings rejected the first null hypothesis claiming politeness strategies used by each of intermediate and upper-intermediate subjects were identical. On the contrary, the results confirmed the hypothesis that there is a difference in politeness strategy use between intermediate and upper-intermediate learners.

### **4.2. Investigation of hypothesis two**

The hypothesis presumed that internal and external modifications are used similarly in both upper-intermediate and intermediate learners. The chi-square statistic was employed for the nullification or endorsement of the hypothesis, which is illustrated in tables 9 and 10.

As illustrated, the second null hypothesis is also rejected at 0.05 level of significance. Thus, internal and external modifications were significantly different depending on language proficiency level. Consequently, hypothesis two is proved. It seems that the unconventional the level of language proficiency, the more appropriately the learners opt for modifications of both types. As tabulated above, the upper-intermediate learners significantly outperformed the intermediate in the application of external modifications. This shows that in situations with power

inconsistency (five situations out of eight in DCT), increasing the proficiency level of the learners will lead to more external modifications and the learners understood that they had to give some reasons for their requests to prevent the face threatening act and achieve better responses by the addressee.

### **4.3. Investigation of hypothesis three**

Taking the third null hypothesis into consideration which claimed that females and males similarly use politeness strategies; first, the total frequency of both genders was calculated and then to prove or reject the null hypothesis, chi-square test was employed. The results are demonstrated in tables 11 and 12.

To examine if a significant difference could be proved between genders in their utilization of politeness strategies, a chi-square test was implemented and the following results were gained. As far as frequency analysis is concerned, the figures of strategies utilized by both genders were slightly in proximity to each other (Tables 11 and 12). However, to prove any statistical differences, as an added measurement, a further chi-square test was applied to make sure about any potential differences (Tables 13 and 14).

As Table 14 shows, Pearson chi-square test could not lead us to grasp a significant difference between males and females' request strategy use in the given DCT. Therefore, both males and females were similar in this regard at their performance. Although, the number of negative politeness strategy use in requests produced by females was more than that of males due to the fact that on the basis of Brown and Levinson's taxonomy five situations in DCT needed negative type of politeness, it was not so prominent to be statistically significant.

### **4.4. Investigation of hypothesis four**

Gender has continued to play an important role in linguistic studies recently. The fourth null hypothesis presumed the application of the same type of internal and external modifications by both genders. Similarly, in order to reject or to accept the hypothesis, a chi-square was needed. Tables 15 and 16 are illustrating this fact. Pearson Chi-square test results, as demonstrated via tables 15 and 16, were used for the comparison of males and females internal/external modifications and proved that males and females in our study were not different in terms of their modifications.

## **5. Conclusion**

In order to figure out the differences in written requests which were applied by upper intermediate or intermediate participants of our study, based on Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies (1987) and Faerch and Kasper's internal/external modifications theory (1989) and gender as an added variable for seeking any possible differences between females and males application of

politeness strategies and modifications, the present study was conducted using a DCT adapted form Rose (1994) which was distributed among upper-intermediate and intermediate female and male EFL learners. The following sections briefly explain the findings.

To clasp the type of politeness strategy and internal/external modifications used by upper-intermediate and intermediate female and male learners, utterances of requests produced by EFL learners were divided and counted grounded on Brown and Levinson's politeness taxonomy and Faerch and Kasper's modifications category. Politeness strategies were allocated to four types, namely, positive, negative, bald on record, and off-record. Depending on eight situations available in DCT, numerous types of politeness strategies and internal/external modifications were employed by the subjects. Having analyzed the obtained data descriptively (frequency analysis) and inferentially (Pearson chi-square), the researcher achieved the succeeding results.

The results unveiled that upper-intermediate and intermediate EFL learners used politeness strategies statistically differently. Taking data analysis into consideration, the upper-intermediate learners used more appropriate politeness strategies in the given situations in DCT compared to the intermediate. In fact, they used more negative politeness strategy which was the most fitting strategy for five circumstances out of eight in DCT. The examination of the collected data indicated a statistically significant difference between upper-intermediate and intermediate groups in applying the internal/external modifications. Faerch (1989) and Aidinlou (2012) in their research similarly found a positive correlation in terms of proficiency and internal/external modifications; in other words, the higher the proficiency level of the learners, the more appropriate internal/external in both quantity and type will be used. Thus, the results of this study are in line with the previously undertaken studies. Meanwhile, the findings of this study proved that upper-intermediate learners used further external modifications since they could mitigate not only the face threatening acts but also requests.

Gender and its association with politeness strategies were concerned throughout the third research question and consequently the third hypothesis. Using chi-square, we could not find any significant difference between application of politeness hypothesis between the subjects in terms of gender. Of course, females used more negative politeness strategy compared to the male counterparts, but this finding was not much enough to bring about statistically significant difference. As a result, generally, females used more polite language. The results support the findings of the previous studies undertaken on this topic (for example, Xinjian, 2008; and Nakahama, 1999).

In order to examine the fourth and in fact the last research question which was seeking any possible differences between females and males internal/external

modification utilization, the chi-square was not indicative of any statistically significant difference. This finding similarly goes with previous research findings (for example, Trosborg, 1995; Eslamirasekh, 1993). To gain the results, the category and occurrence of internal and external modifications in both males and females and in the head acts (internal modification) and supportive move (external modification) were specified and counted. Internal modifications mitigate the force of requests syntactically or lexically. According to Trosborg (1995), syntactic devices are used to show that the requester lowers his/her expectation about fulfillment of the request by the requestee and external modifications are used as persuasive means to persuade the hearer to fulfill the action that is requested by the speaker. Although the frequency of internal/external modifications adopted by females was more than that produced by males, the difference between them was not sufficient to be taken as statistically significant.

### **5.1 Pedagogical implications**

This study gives an insight to the politeness strategies and internal/external modifications used by male and female upper-intermediate and intermediate EFL learners and the differences in employing them. The results show how upper-intermediate and intermediate learners were polite across their English language performance.

This study informs teachers of the differences which exist between upper-intermediate and intermediate learners performances of requests and assists them in understanding the probable problems that learners might encounter. It sheds light on the strategies more frequently used by Iranian learners of English. Furthermore, results of this study make all teachers cognizant of the politeness strategies, internal and external modifications employed by upper-intermediate and intermediate learners in request forms. Awareness of these strategies, teachers can manage their students' pragmatic competence more resourcefully. This resourcefulness harvests an opportunity to compare nonnatives with native speakers' requests to detect the cases of inapt use of requests. Therefore, as Ellis (1992) asserts, awareness raising and conscious teaching and learning of these differences will help different proficiency level learners to get attuned to native speakers' norms.

The present study also sheds light on the significance of pragmatic and communicative competencies which are usually overshadowed by the dominance of linguistic competence in Iranian educational settings. It draws the teachers' attention to the point that they have an eye on the activation of communicative competence as well.

## Appendices

**Table 1:** Demographic Profile of Participants of the Research

Level	Female	Male
Intermediate	30	30
Upper-intermediate	30	30

**Table 2:** Total Frequency of Politeness Strategies among Female English Learners

Level	Positive	Negative	Bald on record	Off-record
Upper-intermediate	89	104	32	13
Intermediate	109	95	30	4

**Table 3:** Total Frequency of Politeness Strategies among Male English Learners

Level	Positive	Negative	Bald on record	Off-record
Upper-intermediate	107	83	39	11
Intermediate	99	91	37	12

**Table 4:** Total Frequency of External/Internal Modifications Based on Level

Level	Modifications	
	Internal	External
Upper-intermediate	192	286
Intermediate	335	142

**Table 5:** Total Frequency of External/Internal Modifications Based on Gender

Gender	Modifications	
	Internal	External
Female	274	228
Male	253	200

**Table 6:** Total Frequency of Politeness Strategies among upper-intermediate and intermediate English Learners

Level	Off-record	Bald on record	Negative	Positive
Upper-intermediate	24	71	217	166
Intermediate	16	67	186	208

**Table 7:** Crosstabs for the politeness Strategies used by Intermediate and Upper-intermediate Learners

		Politeness strategy				Total	
		positive	negative	Bald on record	Off record		
level	Upper-intermedia	Count	166	217	71	24	478
		Expected Count	187.2	201.7	69.1	20.0	478.0
	intermediate	Count	208	186	67	16	477
		Expected Count	186.8	201.3	68.9	20.0	477.0
	Total	Count	374	403	138	40	955
		Expected Count	374.0	403.0	138.0	40.0	955.0

**Table 8:** Chi-Square for Politeness Strategies used by Intermediate and Upper-intermediate Learners

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	8.816 <sup>a</sup>	3	.032
Likelihood Ratio	8.839	3	.032
Linear-by-Linear Association	5.971	1	.015
N of Valid Cases	955		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 19.98.

\*: Significant at 5% level

**Table 9:** The crosstabs for internal/external modifications used by upper-intermediate and intermediate learners

			modifications		Total
			Internal	external	
Level 1	Upper-intermediate	Count	192	286	478
		Expected Count	263.8	214.2	478.0
	intermediate	Count	335	142	477
		Expected Count	263.2	213.8	477.0
Total		Count	527	428	955
		Expected Count	527.0	428.0	955.0

**Table 10:** Chi-square for internal/external modifications used by upper-intermediate and intermediate learners

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	87.250 <sup>a</sup>	1	.000		
Continuity Correction <sup>b</sup>	86.039	1	.000		
Likelihood Ratio	88.699	1	.000		
Fisher's Exact Test				.000	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	87.159	1	.000		
N of Valid Cases	955				

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 213.78.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

\*: Significant at 5 % level

**Table 11:** Total Frequency of Politeness Strategies among Female English Learners

Level	Positive	Negative	Bald on record	Off-record
Upper-intermediate	79	114	32	13
Intermediate	96	98	30	4

**Table 12:** Total Frequency of Politeness Strategies among Male English Learners

Level	Positive	Negative	Bald on record	Off-record
Upper-intermediate	87	103	39	11
Intermediate	112	88	37	12

**Table 13:** Crosstabs for Politeness Strategies Used by Female and Male Learners

			Politeness strategy				Total
			Positive	negative	Bald on record	Off-record	
Gender	females	Count	175	212	62	17	466
		Expected Count	182.5	196.6	67.3	19.5	466.0
	males	Count	199	191	76	23	489
		Expected Count	191.5	206.4	70.7	20.5	489.0
Total		Count	374	403	138	40	955
		Expected Count	374.0	403.0	138.0	40.0	955.0

**Table 14:** Chi-Square for Politeness Strategy Use and Gender

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	4.403 <sup>a</sup>	3	.221
Likelihood Ratio	4.408	3	.221
Linear-by-Linear Association	.051	1	.821
N of Valid Cases	955		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 19.52.

\*: Not Significant at 5% level

**Table 15:** Crosstabs for gender and internal/external modifications .

		modifications		Total	
		Internal	external		
Gender	female	Count	274	228	502
		Expected Count	277.0	225.0	502.0
	male	Count	253	200	453
		Expected Count	250.0	203.0	453.0
Total		Count	527	428	955
		Expected Count	527.0	428.0	955.0



**Table 4.16:** Chi-square for gender and internal/external modifications

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.155 <sup>a</sup>	1	.694		
Continuity Correction <sup>b</sup>	.108	1	.743		
Likelihood Ratio	.155	1	.694		
Fisher's Exact Test				.696	.371
Linear-by-Linear Association	.155	1	.694		
N of Valid Cases	955				

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 203.02.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

\*Not Significant at 5% level

## References

- Achiba, M. (2003). *Learning to request in a second language: A study of Child interlanguage pragmatics*. (Vol. 2). Multilingual Matters.
- Blum-Kulka, S. & Olshtain, E. (1984). Requests and Apologies: A Cross-Cultural Study of Speech Act Realization Patterns (CCSARP). *Applied linguistics*, 5(3), 196-213.
- Blum-Kulka, S. & Olshtain, E. (1986). Too many words: Length of utterance and pragmatic failure. *Studies in second language acquisition*, 8(02), 165-179.
- Brown, P. & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage* (Vol. 4). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chen, C.-F. E. (2001). Making E-Mail Requests to Professors: Taiwanese vs. American Students. Available at: <http://www2.nkfust.edu.tw/~emchen/Home/Chen%20Papers/Making%20email%20requests%20to%20professors.pdf>
- Cohen, A. D. (2006). Investigating the production of speech act sets. In Gass, S. & Neu, J. (Eds.), *Speech acts across cultures: Challenges to communication in a second language* (pp. 21-43). Mouton de Gruyter. DOI (Chapter): <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110219289.1.21>

- Cohen, A. D. (2004). Assessing speech acts in a second language. *Studying speaking to inform second language learning* (pp. 302-327). Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.
- Cohen, A. D., & Olshtain, E. (1993). The production of speech acts by EFL learners. *Tesol Quarterly*, 27(1), 33-56. DOI: 10.2307/3586950
- Ellis, R. (1992). Learning to communicate in the classroom. *Studies in second language acquisition*, 14(01), 1-23.  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263100010445>
- Ervin-Tripp, S. (1976). Is Sybil there? The structure of some American English directives. *Language in Society*, 5(01), 25-66.
- Faerch, C. & Kasper, G. (1989). Internal and external modification in interlanguage request realization. In Blum-Kulka, S., House, J. & Kasper, G. (Eds.), *Cross-cultural pragmatics* (pp. 221-247). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Ford, S. (2003). "Dear Mr. Shawn": A Lesson in E-mail Pragmatics (Netiquette). *TESOL Journal*, 12(1), 39-40. DOI: 10.1002/j.1949-3533.2003.tb00119.x
- Hill, B., Ide, S., Ikuta, S., Kawasaki, A. & Ogino, T. (1986). Universals of linguistic politeness: Quantitative evidence from Japanese and American English. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 10(3), 347-371.
- Hymes, D. H. & Gumperz, J. J. (1972). *Directions in sociolinguistics: the ethnography of communication*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Keshavarz, M. H., Atai, M. Reza, & Ahmadi, H. (2007). Content schemata, linguistic simplification, and EFL readers' comprehension and recall. *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 19(1), 19.
- Koike, D. A. (1989). Pragmatic competence and adult L2 acquisition: Speech acts in interlanguage. *The Modern Language Journal*, 73(3), 279-289.
- Lan, L. (2000). Email: a challenge to Standard English? *English Today*, 16(04), 23-29.
- Leech, G. N. (1983). *Principles of pragmatics*. Taylor & Francis.
- Nakahama, Y. (1999). Requests in L1/L2 Japanese and Americans English; a cross cultural investigation of politeness. In Boutton, L. (Ed.), *Pragmatics and Lanuage learning. Volume 9* (pp. 1-29). Urbana, IL: Division of English as an International Language.
- Nelson, G. L., Carson, J., Al Batal, M., & El Bakary, W. (2002). Cross-cultural pragmatics: Strategy use in Egyptian Arabic and American English refusals. *Applied Linguistics*, 23(2), 163-189. DOI: 10.1093/applin/23.2.163
- Rose, K. R. (1994). On the Validity of Discourse Completion Tests in Non-Western Contexts1. *Applied linguistics*, 15(1), 1-14.

- Rose, K. R. & Ono, R. (1995). Eliciting speech act data in Japanese: The effect of questionnaire type. *Language learning*, 45(2), 191-223. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-1770.1995.tb00438.x
- Scollon, R., Scollon, S. W., & Jones, R. H. (2011). *Intercultural communication: A discourse approach*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Tanck, S. (2002). Speech act sets of refusal and complaint: A comparison of native and non-native English speakers' production. *TESOL Working Papers*, Available at: <http://www.leadership.american.edu/cas/tesol/pdf/upload/WP-2004-Tanck-Speech-Act.pdf>
- Trosborg, A. (1995). *Interlanguage pragmatics: Requests, complaints, and apologies*. Volume 7: Studies in Anthropological Linguistics. Berlin & New York: de Gruyter Mouton.
- Xinjian, M. (2008). Gender effects on advanced Chinese EFL learners' requests strategies: A contrastive study of request strategies in Chinese and English. University of Nanjing. Available at: [www.cxrlinguistics.com/UploadFile/20119199942318.doc](http://www.cxrlinguistics.com/UploadFile/20119199942318.doc)

## **Contacts**

Giti Karimkhanloo

English language Dept, Mahdavi Blvd. Faculty of Medicine, Zanjan  
University of Medical Sciences, P.C. 45139-56111, Zanjan, Iran  
[ghiti@zums.ac.ir](mailto:ghiti@zums.ac.ir)

NargesVaezi

Islamic Azad University, Zanjan, Iran  
[Vaezinarges@gmail.com](mailto:Vaezinarges@gmail.com)