A Cross-Sectional Study of Iranian EFL Learners' Realization of Request Speech Acts

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ABSTRACT

The present cross-sectional study contributes to the research to date on interlanguage pragmatics by exploring Iranian EFL learners' realization of requestive speech acts compared to that of British English native speakers. Specifically, the study examined the requestive behavior of Iranian EFL learners from four different English proficiency levels in terms of directness, as well as the social variables of power and distance to reveal their pragmatic development, if any, in the target language learning.

To this end, a Discourse Completion Test (Jalilafar, 2009), as well as Cross-cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989) were employed to elicit and code requestive interlanguage data from 115 Iranian EFL learners, as well as English baseline data from 10 British native speakers, respectively.

The study findings revealed that there was evidence of pragmatic development across the English proficiency levels of the Iranian learners in terms of directness as well as in relation to the situational variable of power. However, in terms of the strategy selection and frequency of strategy use, as well as the social variable of distance the EFL learners exhibited requestive performance somewhat different from that of the native speakers. In this regard, the advanced level learners, compared to the other levels, showed requestive production closer to that of the British participants. Yet, the Iranian learners at this and lower levels required further development of their pragmatic competence.

In conclusion, this study provides some implications for more effective pedagogy in EFL contexts, as well as suggestions for prospective research.

Keywords: interlanguage pragmatics, pragmatic competence, pragmatic development, request speech act, request strategies

ÖZ

Bu kesitsel çalışma dillerarası edimbilimsel araştırmalarına katkıda bulunmak amacıyla yapılmıştır. Bu bağlamda araştırma, anadili Farsça olan ve İngilizce dil eğitimi gören öğrencilerin rica sözeylemi gerçekleştirmelerini anadili İngilizce olan katılımcılarla karşılaştırarak ortaya cıkarmaya çalışmıştır. Özellikle, direktlik seviyesinde ve güç/tanışıklık sosyal etkenleri açısından farklı İngilizce yeterlik düzeyinde İranlı öğrencilerin rica sözeylemlerinde edimbilimsel gelişmenin olup olmadığı incelenmiştir. Bu amaca uygun olarak 115 İranlı öğrenciden dillerarası verilerin ve 10 anadili İngilizce olan katılımcıdan İngilizce kaynak verilerin toplanması icin Söylem Tamamlama Aracı (Jalilafar, 2009) ve verilerin kodlanmasi için CCSARP Projesi (Blum-Kulka, House ve Kasper, 1989) kullanılmıştır.

Çalışmanın sonuçları, İranlı öğrencilerde direktlik seviyesi ve durumsal farklılaşma gösteren güç etkenleri açısından İngilizce yeterlik düzeyi ile orantılı olarak kullanımbilimsel gelişimin olduğunu göstermiştir. Fakat, İranlı öğrenciler rica sözeylemini gerçekleştirirken, tanışıklık etkeni, strateji seçiminde ve uygulama sıklığında, anadili İngilizce olan katılımcılardan daha farklı rica davranışları sergilemiştir. Bu bağlamda, ileri seviyedeki öğrenciler, alt seviyedeki öğrencilere göre İngiliz katılımcılara daha yakın rica performansı göstermiştir. Buna karşın, her iki düzeydeki öğrencilerin kullanım yeterliği konusunda daha çok yol katetmeleri gerekmektedir.

Sonuç olarak, bu araştırma, İngilizce'nin yabancı dil olarak kullanıldığı kontekstler için verimli olabilecek eğitsel öneriler ve dillerarası edimbilim alanında yapılacak araştırmalara ışık tutacak öneriler sunmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Dillerarası edimbilim, edimbilimsel yeterlik/gelişme, rica sözeylemi, rica stratejileri.

To my family

I cordially dedicate this study to my lovely husband who has been always the biggest source of inspiration for me and has been always supporting me.

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 Presentation

This chapter introduces the background of the study, the problem statement and the purpose of the study, respectively. It also presents the significance of the study as well as the definitions of the significant terms.

1.2 Background of the Study

"What does it mean to know a language well and to use it successfully?" These questions have been an everlasting concern in language education (Cook, 2003, p. 40). Throughout the history of English language teaching it was the concern with language knowledge that occupied the agenda of the traditional methods. The concern with successful language use has become more significant with the introduction of a new concept, communicative competence (Hymes, 1971) as well as the advent of Communicative Language Teaching in the 1970s.

Communicative competence requires four types of knowledge, possibility, feasibility, attestedness as well as appropriateness. Therefore, pragmatic competence, "the speaker's knowledge and use of rules of appropriateness and politeness, which dictate the way the speaker will understand and formulate speech acts" (Koike, 1989, p. 279), constitutes an inherent parameter of Hymes' influential model. Indeed, language learners who aim to become communicatively competent, require not only knowledge of lexico-grammar, which is "important…but not sufficient" (Olshtain &

Cohen, 1991, p. 154), but also knowledge of "the social and contextual factors underlying the English language" (Uso-Juan & Martinez-Flor, 2008, p. 349), especially in terms of inter-cultural communication (White, 1993).

In the contemporary world, given the prevalent cross-cultural communication within and beyond countries, language instruction is expected to focus on communicative use of the target language. In this regard, Bardovi-Harlig, Hartford, Mahan-Taylor, Morgan, and Reynolds (1991) contend that

> when we approach the language class as an opportunity for learners to expand their communication across cultural boundaries, we, as teachers, have the responsibility to equip them with not only the structural aspects of the language, but with the pragmatics as well: more simply, the right words to say at the proper time. (pp. 13-14)

It should be taken into account that in inter-cultural communication "erroneous attributions occur" when interlocutors "violate not just the surface features of language, but the conditions which give meaning to speakers' and hearers' intentions and interpretations" (White, 1993, p. 201).

Language pedagogy, therefore, should promote language learners' pragmatic awareness and competence in the target language, especially in terms of emphasis on one of the significant pragmatic features, speech acts, through adequate pedagogical practices. It should be noted that languages have various lexico-syntactic means to realize speech acts, hence established, conventional forms for performing them in a polite, acceptable manner which poses serious problems for EFL learners, for example, in making and mitigating requests (Takahashi, 1996).

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Teaching pragmatics has occupied an important role in ESL/EFL curricula (Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; Meier, 1997; Olshtain & Cohen, 1991; Tanaka, 1997). Nowadays, development of pragmatic competence is regarded as "the process of establishing sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic competence and the increasing ability to understand and produce sociopragmatic meanings with pragmalinguistic conventions" (Kasper & Roever, 2005, p. 318, cited in Alcon Soler & Martinez-Flor, 2008, p. 5). However, pragmatic instruction has not paid adequate attention to language learners' overall development of pragmatic competence which has proved to be very challenging in English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts.

Second language learners, therefore, need instructional help to develop their awareness and sensitivity to the target language use. In this regard, language teachers should remind their learners that effective and successful communication not only in their native but also in the target language requires acquisition of grammatical knowledge as well as, importantly, acquisition and practice of various sociolinguistic rules in order to learn what is appropriate in the target language (Eslami & Noora, 2008, p. 326). It is believed that language learners' proficiency level can influence development of their pragmatic competence in the target language. However, "Even fairly advanced language learners' communicative acts regularly contain pragmatic errors, or deficits, in that they fail to convey or comprehend the intended illocutionary force or politeness value" (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p. 10).

Speech acts are regarded as "one of the most compelling notions" in pragmatics, (Eslami-Rasekh, 1993, p. 86)**.** In this regard, requestive speech acts are integral as well as indispensable in routine human interaction; therefore, their mastery is crucial

for language learners' pragmatic competence. Requests have been noted in terms of "identifiable ways" they "are made in different languages as well as differences in how they are expressed across languages and cultures" (Lightbown & Spada, 2006, p. 102). Importantly, "A single utterance such as a request can, and often does, serve a number of illocutionary acts and without requests it would be difficult for the learner to function effectively." (Pütz & Neff-van Aertselaer, 2008, p. xiv)

Language pedagogy should take into account empirical findings of pragmatic research on language users' perception and production of various pragmatic features. The research to date has demonstrated that foreign language instructional contexts do not offer language learners adequate access to pragmatic input in terms of varying social situations (Alcon Soler & Martinez-Flor, 2008), and that even proficient language learners face difficulties with successful communication (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990), thus exhibiting pragmatic failure, especially in realization of face-threatening speech acts (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986; Edmondson et al., 1984). In this regard, Jalilafar's (2009) study demonstrated Iranian university students' problems in production of English requests, especially their lack of sensitivity to contextual factors.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

Pertinent research in the Iranian EFL context is still scarce; to our knowledge, a single cross-sectional study into Iranian EFL learners' request production (Jalilafar, 2009) has been conducted at the university level. Given the scarcity of the research into speech acts in the context, the purpose of the present cross-sectional study was to examine realization of English request speech acts by Iranian EFL learners at a private English language institute, specifically to explore their pragmatic

development, if any, across different English language proficiency levels. The study addressed the following research questions:

1) How does the Iranian EFL learners' realization of request strategies on the Discourse Completion Task compare with that of the British native speakers in terms of directness?

2) How does the EFL learners' pragmatic performance compare with that of the native speakers in terms of the social variables of power and distance?

3) Is there evidence of the pragmatic development on the part of the Iranian learners across different English proficiency levels?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The present study can be considered significant in that studies on EFL learners' interlanguage in the Iranian instructional context, specifically in relation to speech acts, are scarce. Further, unlike the previous studies conducted at state universities, the present study was carried out at one of the large private English language institutes in Tehran. Importantly, it collected interlanguage requestive data from Iranian EFL learners across different English proficiency levels; it is, therefore, hoped that the study findings can contribute to the literature on Interlanguage Pragmatics. As noted by Alcon Soler and Martinez-Flor (2008, p. 11), "the research outcomes across different educational settings might help to generalize the effect of different variables on pragmatic learning".

Moreover, this study provided baseline data from British native speakers of English, in addition to the extant American and Australian native speaker baseline data in the previous research. Finally, the present research envisaged contributing empirical

findings to teaching pragmatics in the Iranian, as well as other EFL instructional contexts.

1.6 Definition of Terms

This section presents the most significant terms used throughout the study:

Interlanguage:

Interlanguage is second language learners' developing target language knowledge (Selinker, 1972).

Interlanguage Pragmatics:

Interlanguage Pragmatics is concerned with nonnative speakers' comprehension and production of pragmatics and how that L2-related knowledge is acquired (Kasper & Dahl, 1991).

Communicative Competence:

Communicative competence refers to the knowledge of whether something is formally possible, feasible, appropriate as well as done in language use (Hymes, 1971).

Pragmatic competence:

Pragmatic competence is defined as "the speaker's knowledge and use of rules of appropriateness and politeness, which dictate the way the speaker will understand and formulate speech acts" (Koike, 1989, p. 279).

Speech acts:

Speech acts refer to “the basic or minimal units of linguistic communication” (Searle, 1969, p. 16).

Request:

Request is defined as a directive speech act in which the speaker asks the hearer to perform an action which is for the exclusive benefit of the speaker (Trosborg, 1995).

Requestive strategy:

The pragmalinguistic convention by which the request is realized (Eslami & Noora, 2008, p. 310).

Directness/Indirectness:

Searle (1975, pp. 60-62) distinguished between direct and indirect speech acts, highlighting in the former a transparent relationship between form and function. As to the latter, indirect speech acts combine “a non-literal primary illocutionary act” and “a literal secondary illocutionary act” constituting “a performance of that illocutionary act”.

Politeness:

Politeness refers to a mixture of formal as well as functional features accompanying inherently face-threatening speech act, such as requests, in order to minimize their threat (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Face-threatening acts:

Face-threatening acts refer to acts which run contrary to the addressee's self-image (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Social distance:

Symmetric social dimension of similarity/difference within which the interlocutors stand for the purpose of an act and material/non-material goods exchanged between them (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 76).

Social power:

The degree to which the hearer can impose his own plans and his own self-evaluation (face) at the expense of the speaker's plans and self-evaluation (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 77).

Discourse Completion Task (DCT):

DCT is a questionnaire containing a set of very briefly described situations designed to elicit a particular speech act (Varghese & Billmyer, 1996, p. 40).

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Presentation

This chapter provides an overview of pragmatics and interlanguage pragmatics; further, it pertains to pragmatic competence and development. Subsequently, the chapter provides traditional views and current perspectives on speech act theory, as well as politeness/impoliteness, respectively. The last two sections focus on requestive speech acts and teaching pragmatics.

2.2 Interlanguage Pragmatics

One of the prominent pragmatists, Jacob Mey, stated that "Pragmatics has come into its own and it is here to stay." Importantly, the language user has become the center of attention, and the "user's point of view… a common orienting feature for pragmatic research" (2007, pp. 3-5). The concept of pragmatics was first introduced by Charles Morris (1938, p. 30) who viewed it as "the science of the relations of signs to their interpreters". Language use consists "of continuous making of linguistic choices, consciously or unconsciously, for language-internal (i.e. structural) and/or language external reasons. These choices can be situated at any level of linguistic form: phonetic/phonological, morphological, syntactic, lexical, and semantic." (Verschueren, 1999, p. 56)

One of the contemporary views on pragmatics holds that it is "concerned with the study of meanings as communicated by a speaker (or writer) and interpreted by a listener (or reader)" (Yule, 1996, p. 3). Indeed, successful communication is considered to be dependent not only on "the exchange of symbolic expressions, … (but) rather, the successful interpretation by an addressee of a speaker's intent in performing a linguistic act" (Green, 1996, p. 1). Pragmatics, therefore, "studies the knowledge and procedures which enable people to understand each other's words", and it is mostly concerned with "what speakers intend to do with their words and what it is which makes this intention clear" (Cook, 2003, p. 51). Two perspectives, pragmalinguistic and sociolinguistic, were proposed in terms of language use. The former is concerned with the use of linguistic strategies to express an intended pragmatic meaning, whereas the latter with the socially based beliefs, judgments and interactional rules underlying language users' strategy choice (Leech, 1983; Thomas, 1983).

Current approaches to pragmatics take into account the fact that human "communicative behavior relies heavily on people's capacity to engage in reasoning about each other's intentions, exploiting not only the evidence presented by the signals in the language code but also evidence from other sources, including perception and general world knowledge" (Spenser-Oatey & Zegarac, 2002, p. 75). Pragmatics, therefore, is regarded as the study of "the use of language in human communication as determined by the conditions of society"; importantly, it is believed that "Pragmatics opened up a societal window on language acquisition and language use…" (Mey, 2007, pp. 6, 290).

Studies of second language pragmatics contributed to the establishment of interlanguage pragmatics (hereafter ILP) concerned with how nonnative speakers comprehend and produce pragmatic features and how L2 related knowledge is acquired (Kasper & Dahl, 1991; Kasper & Schmidt, 1996). Interlanguage is regarded as second language learners' developing target language knowledge (Selinker, 1972); as development of the ability to express their intentions and meanings through various speech acts (Bardovi-Harlig, 1999). Specifically, interlanguage pragmatics addresses issues related to "learners' production and perception of speech acts, factors influencing pragmatic learning and the teachability of pragmatics" (Alcon Soler & Martinez-Flor, 2008, p. 4). As regards the latter, Rose (2005, p. 386) suggested several related issues, "whether pragmatics is teachable, whether instruction in pragmatics produces results that outpace exposure alone, and whether different instructional approaches yield different outcomes."

Acquisitional studies have become one of the major research strands of ILP, manifested by a range of studies conducted over the past decades, specifically into pragmatic development of L2 learners (Bardovi-Harlig, 1999; Kasper, 1992; Kasper & Rose, 1999; Kasper & Schmidt, 1996; Koike, 1996; Olshtain & Blum-Kulka, 1985; Rose, 2000; Scarcella, 1979; Trosborg, 1995). Kasper and Schmidt (1996) regarded pragmatic development as central to ILP research, specifically the issue of "How or why L2 pragmatics is or is not acquired?" (Bardovi-Harlig, 2002, p. 188) Comparison of foreign language learners' performance in L2 with that of native speakers of the target language demonstrated that it is universal or L1 based pragmatic knowledge that adult language learners rely on (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Kasper & Rose, 1999; Kasper & Schmidt, 1996). Furthermore, it is held that ILP

studies should ideally include “beginners through advanced learners” (Bardovi-Harlig, 2002, p. 186).

In this regard, Kasper (2001, p. 506) noted “the scarcity of developmental research” and summarized the two major outcomes of the related research, the first result being learners’ acquisition of L2 grammatical features prior to acquisition of related pragmalinguistic functions; whereas the second indicating learners’ use of L2 pragmatic functions prior to acquisition of L2 grammatical forms “that are acceptable realizations of those functions”. Importantly, Bardovi-Harlig (2002, p. 192) contended that “The research in pragmatics and SLA of the future promises not only to describe and explain development of L2 pragmatics but also contribute to our fundamental knowledge of what constitutes pragmatic competence.” We, therefore, need pragmatics for “a fuller, deeper and generally more reasonable account of human language behavior” (Mey, 2007, p. 12).

2.3 Pragmatic Competence and Development

The concept of communicative competence was defined and re-defined in various terms as follows: in sociological terms by Gumperz (1972, p. 205, cited in Kramsch, 1996) as “the ability to select, from the totality of grammatically correct expressions available to [the speaker], forms which appropriately reflect the social norms governing behavior in specific encounters”; in social interactional terms by Savignon (1983, p. 303, cited in Kramsch, 1996) as “the expression, interpretation, and negotiation of meaning involving interaction between two or more persons belonging to the same (or different) speech community (communities)”. Further, in language teaching communicative competence was regarded by Terrell (1977, p.

326, cited in Kramsch, 1996) in terms of individual, however interlocutor-directed terms as students' ability to "understand the essential points of what a native speaker says…in a real communication situation" as well as " respond in such a way that the native speaker interprets the response with little or no effort and without errors that are so distracting that they interfere drastically with communication"; in methodological terms communicative competence was viewed by Omaggio (1986, p. 16, cited in Kramsch, 1996) as a person's language ability "to handle everyday social encounters…with some degree of appropriateness", as well as "to hold up [one's] own end of the conversation by making inquiries and offering more elaborate responses". Thus, the multiplicity and diversity of definitions and views related to communicative competence across various disciplines reflect its complexity as well as multi-facetedness.

According to Hymes, a communicatively competent person knows "when to speak, when not, … what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner" as well as is able "to accomplish a repertoire of speech acts, to take part in speech events, and to evaluate their accomplishment by others" (1972, pp. 14-15). Pragmatic competence, therefore, as an integral part of communicative competence, is defined as "the speaker's knowledge and use of rules of appropriateness and politeness, which dictate the way the speaker will understand and formulate speech acts" (Koike, 1989, p. 279).

In Bachman's communicative model (1990) pragmatic competence as well as organizational competence is treated as part of language competence. Organizational competence necessitates grammatical and textual competence (knowledge of

morphology and syntax as well as employment of related linguistic elements together at the sentential and discourse levels), whereas pragmatic competence requires illocutionary competence (knowledge of speech acts and speech functions) and sociolinguistic competence (the ability to use language appropriately according to context). Thus pragmatic competence includes the ability to select communicative acts and appropriate strategies to implement them depending on the contextual features of the situation. In this model pragmatic competence, therefore, is not subordinated to knowledge of grammar and text organization, rather it coordinates with formal linguistic and textual knowledge as well as interacts with organizational competence in complex ways.

Canale and Swain's (1980) communicative competence framework encompasses grammatical competence, strategic competence, as well as sociolinguistic competence. Grammatical competence refers to knowledge of lexical items, as well as phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic rules. Strategic competence pertains to both verbal and non-verbal communication strategies required to compensate for communication breakdown due to inadequate competence or performance variables. Sociolinguistic competence is regarded as the ability to recognize as well as produce language appropriate to social context (Canale & Swain, 1980, pp. 28-31).

More recently, pragmatic competence is considered to be "an understanding of the relationship between form and context that enables us, accurately and appropriately, to express and interpret intended meaning" (Murray, 2010, p. 293). Mastery of pragmatic competence, therefore, involving ability to "employ different linguistic

formulae in an appropriate way when interacting in a particular social and cultural context" (Uso-Juan & Martinez-Floor, 2008, p. 349), is very challenging for language learners, especially in EFL contexts. They may experience various difficulties caused by the influence of the first language and/or misconceptions about the target language. In this regard, Thomas (1983) differentiated socio-pragmatic failure (inappropriate utterances caused by a misunderstanding of social standards) and pragmalinguistic failures (utterances that convey unintended illocutionary force). It is noteworthy that, unlike accuracy errors, pragmatic errors are not likely to be tolerated by native speakers of the target language (Wolfson, 1983). Therefore, pragmatic failure can be fraught with serious consequences for language learners such as difficulties in establishing social relations with native speakers, as well in accessing various educational or professional opportunities (Tanaka, 1997). In this regard, Ellis (1984) concluded that development of pragmatic competence requires time and may not be achievable for some learners. Therefore, promoting second or foreign language learners' pragmatic knowledge and development has been one of the challenging goals of language instruction.

Various theoretical frameworks contributed to our understanding of pragmatic development of L2 learners. In the past decade Kasper (2001) reviewed the work on pragmatic development in information processing, socio-cultural and socialization theories. Information-processing psychological theory (Bialystok, 1993, 1994, cited in Kasper, 2001; Schmidt, 1993, 1995, cited in Kasper, 2001) related pragmatic development to attention, awareness, input and metapragmatic knowledge, whereas socio-cultural theory explored emergence of pragmatic knowledge from "assisted performance, both in student-teacher and peer interaction" (Kasper, 2001, p. 502). In

like fashion, language socialization (Ochs, 1996, cited in Kasper, 2001, p. 502) examined "how cultural and pragmatic knowledge are jointly acquired through learners' participation in recurring situated activities".

In this regard, Kasper cautioned that "…noticing is necessary but not a sufficient condition for pragmatic learning"; however, she noted the suitability of socio-cultural theory to the research into pragmatic development, as well as the eminent capability of language socialization approach of the study of L2 acquisition of pragmatic ability. Both socio-cultural and socialization perspectives "emphasize the developmental roles of interaction and assisted performance in concrete socio-historical contexts" (Kasper, 2001, p. 514). Different theoretical frameworks, therefore, "examine different issues that intervene in the process learners go through when acquiring the pragmatic competence of the target language" (Alcon Soler & Martinez-Flor, 2008, p. 8). Importantly, Kasper contended that for language education, "L2 language socialization, an integral aspect of L2 teaching, relies on teachers' cultural, pragmatic, and interactional expertise in L2 but is not conditional on native-speaker status" (2001, p. 522).

2.4 Speech Act Theory

Speech acts have traditionally been regarded as one of the major areas of pragmatic studies (Levinson, 1983), and, importantly, the major dominant area of pragmatics in SLA research. In this regard, Olshtain and Cohen (1991) noted

> It seems that every language develops a set of patterned, routinized utterances that speakers use regularly to perform a variety of functions, such as apologies, requests, complaints, refusals, compliments, and others. By using a routinized utterance of this kind, the speaker carries out an act with respect to the hearer. (p. 155)

More recently, Grundy contended that underlying speech-act theory is the language-as-action hypothesis, and the scholar regarded speech acts as a "prototypically pragmatic phenomenon" in that they "challenge the notion that there is a one-to-one correspondence between a form and its function" (2008, pp. 83, 90).

2.4.1 Traditional Views

Speech act theory dates back to the scholarship of language philosophers John Austin (1962) and John Searle (1969, 1975). The scholars proposed their taxonomies of speech acts and attempted to identify the felicity conditions for enabling successful performance of speech acts. Austin (1962) viewed "saying something" as "doing" things, performing actions such as paying compliments, making requests, extending invitations and others. He held, "to utter the sentence (in, of course, the appropriate circumstances) is not to *describe* my doing of what I should be said in so uttering to be doing or to state that I am doing it: it is to do it" (p. 6). The language philosopher distinguished between three aspects of speech acts, locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary, the illocutionary force being the major concern of the research to date. Whereas locutionary acts are performance "of an act *of* saying something", illocutionary acts refer to "performance of an act *in* saying something". Perlocutionary acts pertain to performance of an act with "consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or of the speaker, or of other persons" (Austin, 1962, pp. 99-101).

Austin (1962, pp.150-151) originally classified utterances in accordance with their illocutionary force as follows:

(1) Verdictives, "essentially giving a finding as to something-fact, or value-which is for different reasons hard to be certain about; …the giving of a verdict,…an estimate, reckoning, or appraisal."

(2) Exercitives, "the exercising of powers, rights, or influence. Examples are appointing, voting, ordering, urging, advising, warning …"

(3) Commissives, "typified by promising or otherwise undertaking", commiting to "doing something", also including "declarations or announcements of intention…"

(4) Behabitives, "a very miscellaneous group" having to do "with attitudes and *social behaviour,* …apologizing, congratulating, commending, condoling, cursing, and challenging."

(5) Explositives, "difficult to define", making "plain how our utterances fit into the course of an argument or conversation, how we are using words, or, in general, are expository," "… 'I reply', 'I argue', 'I concede'…"

Austin's taxonomy was later criticized by Searle (1977) and Leech (1983) for overlapping criteria, as well as lack of differentiation between speech acts and speech act verbs.

Searle (1969) subsequently refined and developed Austin's work into a speech act theory. He held that

> speaking a language is performing speech acts, acts such as making statements, giving commands, asking questions, making promises, and so on; and more abstractly, acts such as referring and predicating; and, secondly, that these acts are in general made possible by and are performed in accordance with certain rules for the use of linguistic elements. (Searle, 1969, p. 16)

The scholar defined a speech act as "the basic or minimal units of linguistic communication" and noted its intentional characteristic (Searle, 1969, p. 16). Searle (1979) introduced a five-part classification of speech acts into representatives (or assertives committing the speaker to the truth of expected proposition), commissives (commit the speaker to some further course of action), directives (attempts by the speaker to get the addressee to do something), declarations (influencing immediate change in the institutional state of affairs, with tendency to rely on elaborate extralinguistic information), and expressives (expressing a psychological state).

In this regard, the scholar proposed 12 criteria for classification of speech acts, however, employed the following four: illocutionary point, direction of fit, expressed psychological state, and content. Importantly, Searle (1975, pp. 60-62) distinguished between direct and indirect speech acts, highlighting in the former a transparent relationship between form and function. As to the latter, indirect speech acts combine "a non-literal primary illocutionary act" and "a literal secondary illocutionary act" constituting "a performance of that illocutionary act".

One of Searle's most significant contributions to speech act theory was his elaboration on felicity conditions/rules, which are the conditions that must exist for the successful performance of an illocutionary act. Searle (1969) argued that speech acts are subject to four types of felicity conditions such as propositional content, preparatory, sincerity as well as essential conditions and provided examples of these rules for nine speech acts of requesting, promising, asserting, questioning, thanking, advising, warning, greeting, and congratulating.

2.4.2 Current Perspectives

Speech act theory has been criticized by several researchers including Levinson (1981, 1983), Wierzbicka (1991), McCarthy (2001), and Mey (2007). One of their major criticisms pertains to the notion of universality versus cultural specificity. Austin (1962) and Searle (1969, 1975) argued for universal pragmatic principles operating on speech acts, while Wierzbicka (1991) observed that speech acts tend to vary in their conceptualization and verbalization across cultures and languages. Wierzbicka claimed that since its inception, speech act theory has "suffered from astonishing ethnocentrism" (p. 25) due to the fact that its conclusions were based on observation of English language speakers. Wierzbicka maintained that many theorists are under the fallacy "that what seems to hold for the speakers of English must hold for people generally" (1991, p. 25).

Therefore, contemporary studies into speech acts are concerned with the following issues:

-What cultural differences (if any) are there in the effect of context on the performance of speech acts?

-What cultural differences (if any) are there in the impact of socio-pragmatic principles on people's performance of speech acts?

-What language differences (if any) are there in the influence of pragma-linguistic conventions on the performance of speech acts?" (Spencer-Oatey & Zegarac, 2002, p. 87)

More recently, Mey contended (2007) that

> All speech is a situated speech; a speech act is never just an 'act of speech', but should be considered in the total situation of activity of which it is a part

> …, and therefore,…it is always *a pragmatic* act, rather than a mere speech act. (p. 94)

The scholar, therefore, noted the necessity of including the criteria of reference and contextual conditions of speech acting for its pragmatic understanding (Mey, 2007, p. 119). Mey observed, "In a wider perspective, however, one should ask how a speech act functions in society, or whether it functions there at all." (2007, p. 94)

Regarding directness and politeness dimensions of speech acts, Meier argued that some studies challenge "the posited linear relationship between indirectness and politeness by showing that directness can be appropriate or polite way to make a request, or that a particular culture values directness" (1997, p. 23). Importantly, Mey (2007) asserted that

> the indirect speech act dilemma is resolved by moving the focus of attention from the words being said to the things being done. In the sense that 'indirectness' is a straight derivative *from* the situation, and inasmuch as all speech acting depends *on* the situation"; "in a situational sense there are only indirect speech acts; alternatively, …no speech act, in and by itself, makes any sense (p. 120).

It is noteworthy that Grundy (2008) underscored the double pragmatic nature of speech acts in that "they are pragmatic first because they convey meaning (illocutionary force) that are not entailments of the words actually used, and at the same time they are typical of other pragmatic phenomena in that these meanings are frequently conveyed indirectly in implicit ways" (p. 76).

The agenda for contemporary speech-act related research includes the following issues (Mey, 2007, p. 98):

-How can we determine a speech act?

-How many speech acts are there, and how are they expressed in language?

-What is the relationship between a speech act and a pragmatic act?

-Are there speech acts (or pragmatic acts) that are found across languages, or even in all languages? (The problem of the so-called universal speech acts.)

Unlike traditional speech-act researchers, who were criticized for reliance on "highly abstracted data" (McCarthy, 2001, p. 11), Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989) conducted a comprehensive Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) and introduced Discourse Completion Tasks (DCT) for investigation of pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic expectations across cultures. The project was based on a series of DCTs comprising scripted situations to elicit apologies and requests by respondents from different cultures, in terms of their use of pragmalinguistic formulas and sociopragmatic behavior.

Frequently, DCTs are administered in the following formats:

- dialogue completion tasks with rejoinders;
- dialogue completion tasks without rejoinders;
- open questionnaires providing only the scenario.

Thus, a standard DCT comprises constructed situations and necessitates completion of utterances. However, DCTs may have advantages as well as disadvantages in terms of the respondent's familiarity or lack of it with the given context(s). Further, it is plausible that "certain, rule-governed linguistic behavior" "allows us to deal with similar situations in similar ways across cultures…" (e.g. requesting)." However, in the event of individual speech acts, "What is polite in one culture may not be polite

in another." Importantly, "…as cultures are different, so are the manifestations of the pragmatic acts that make it possible for humans to live in a particular 'lingua-cultural' habitat" (Mey, 2007, pp. 277- 280).

Further, the following concerns in relation to DCT were noted:

- adequacy of respondents' "self-report" accuracy;
- lack of "real-world social and psychological context";
- view of SA "in terms of reductive taxonomies";
- disregard for "emergent, unpredictable, token utterances".

However, DCT have some delimitations in that related "findings are likely to have practical application in cross-cultural encounters where not only socio-pragmatic knowledge but also pragmalinguistic formulas assist non-native members to communicate effectively and appropriately" (Grundy, 2008, pp. 235-236).

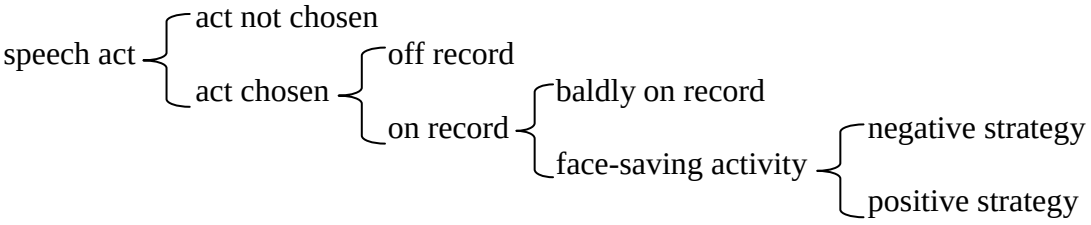
2.5 Politeness

It is held that "Politeness phenomena are…one manifestation of the wider concept of etiquette, or appropriate behavior." Further, "The way we say things to each other has real effect. This is because it encodes not only propositional content but also our understanding of the relationship between us. This insight suggests that every instance of communicated language exhibits politeness." However, "…we wouldn't expect identical computations of appropriate politeness formulas across cultures any more than we would across varying situations in a single culture" (Grundy, 2008, pp. 187, 192, 207).

2.5.1 Traditional Views

An influential politeness model based on 'face' was proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), who considered politeness to be a mixture of formal as well as functional features accompanying inherently face-threatening speech acts, for example requests, in order to minimize their threat.

Figure 2. A schematic representation of Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Model (Ellis, 2008, p. 162)



The scholars claimed that politeness is universal, defined 'face' as "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself", as well as differentiated positive and negative face. The former reflects a person's need of appreciation or approval of his/her face, conversely, the latter reflects a person's "basic claim to…freedom of action and freedom from imposition" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 61). Further, Brown and Levinson also claimed a linear relation between indirectness and politeness, as well as between directness and less politeness.

Furthermore, the scholars attempted to account for the impact of various social factors on language use and regarded such aspects of context as the power-distance relationship between interlocutors, as well as the extent to which one interlocutor imposes on or requires something of the other, as crucial for language choice in terms of politeness. The social distance was defined by Brown and Levinson (1987,

p. 76) as the "symmetric social dimension of similarity /difference within which" the interlocutors "stand for the purpose" of an act and material/non-material goods exchanged between them. The relative power of the hearer was considered to be "the degree to which the hearer can impose his own plans and his own self-evaluation (face) at the expense of the speaker's plans and self-evaluation" (1987, p. 77). Imposition rankings were regarded as "culturally and situationally defined" in terms of "the degree to which they are considered to interfere with an agent's wants of self-determination or of approval" (1987, p. 77).

Brown and Levinson (1987) contended that when confronted with the need to perform a face threatening act, the individual must choose between performing the face threatening act in the most direct and efficient manner, or attempting to mitigate the effect of the face threatening act on the hearer's face. The strategy an individual chooses to employ depends on the seriousness of the face threatening act's weightiness, specifically the speaker considers, while assessing weightiness, such factors as the social distance between the speaker and the listener, the relative power of the listener over the speaker, and the degree of the imposition of the act itself.

2.5.2 Current Perspectives and Impoliteness

Brown and Levinson's model (1987) inspired an extensive empirical research, especially on speech acts. In this regard, however, Meier (1995) claimed that the speech act research to date mirrors Brown and Levinson's politeness model and, therefore, reflects their weaknesses.

Specifically, Meier (1997) identified four major problems with Brown and Levinson's framework: lack of a precise definition of politeness; claim of universal variation of positive and negative faces; claim of linear relation between directness and politeness; the taxonomies for data analysis in speech act research. Further, Meier noted, "…it is difficult to ascertain unifying traits of phenomena termed 'polite', both in Brown and Levinson (1987) and in subsequent literature" (1997, p. 22). It is noteworthy that "it is the hearer who assigns politeness to any utterance within the situation in which it was heard" (Kopytko, 1995, p. 488, cited in Grundy, 2008). Hymes (1986, p. 85) argued that "the sense of universal application invites an invisible ethnocentrism", specifically Anglocentrism (Wierzbicka, 1985). Meier, therefore, criticized the politeness model for its limitations and advocated an alternative, appropriateness approach to politeness, as well as related teaching implications. In this regard, the scholar argued that appropriateness is the most useful working definition of politeness for SL/FL education since it takes into account "contextual features" as well as "socio-cultural assumptions, rather than …so called 'politeness rules'"(1997, p. 21).

More recently, there has been an appeal to English language practitioners to address the issue of impoliteness, which L2 learners can experience in their encounters with other L2 speakers or in the target language context (Mugford, 2008). It is noted that, "Any attempt to define impoliteness in the EFL context is fraught with problems. First of all, impoliteness can be seen in terms of either breaking social norms or being "deliberately offensive and disrespectful towards an interaction" (Mugford, 2008, p. 376). Mugford identified the following related categories: individual, social, cultural impoliteness and banter, as well as noted further problems with impoliteness

such as differences between L1 and L2 interlocutors in terms of interpretation/perception of the seriousness of face-threatening act, the hearer's perception/judgment of an utterance as impolite in the absence of such intention on the part of the native speaker.

2.6 Requestive Speech Acts

2.6.1 The Scholarship on Requests

A plethora of definitions of requests reflects complexity of this speech act indispensable in various domains of human language behavior. In this regard, Olshtain and Cohen (1991) provided a comprehensive definition as follows:

> The speech act of requesting is realized when the speaker verbalizes a wish which can be carried out by the hearer. Thus a request, if it is complied with, requires the hearer to carry out an act to provide some information or goods for the speaker's sake. (p. 157)

White (1993, p. 195) regarded requests as "a class of speech acts…whose function is to instruct H to carry out an act for the benefit of S, subject to H having the ability and the desire to perform the act for S's benefit". In a similar vein, Trosborg (1995) referred a request speech act to a directive in which the speaker asks the hearer to perform an action for the requester's exclusive benefit.

Searle (1975) identified several conditions for fulfilling the speech act of requesting as follows (p. 66):

Table 2.1 *Conditions for Request Speech Act*

Propositional content	Future act A of H.
Preparatory 1. H is able to do A. S believes H is able to do A.	

2. It is not obvious to both S and H that H will do A in the normal course of events of his own accord.	
Sincerity	S wants H to do A.
Essential	Counts as an attempt to get H to do A.

Thus, the Hearer (H) should be able to perform an action; the Speaker (S) wishes that H will perform an action; the H desires to do and does an action.

Requests are considered to be "face threatening acts, since a speaker is imposing his or her will on the hearer" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 65). The three social variables of power, distance and imposition apply to requests as follows:

-The power differential between the requestee and the requester (P);

- The distance-closeness between them (D);

-The degree of imposition of the utterance content (R).

Further, Brown and Yule (1983) differentiated transactional and interactional discourse types that can affect an appropriate speech act of requesting. In the event of transaction the request is performed to transmit information and does not require mitigation. In the event of interaction, the request is made to establish and maintain a social relation, and it is usually downgraded due to a possible degree of imposition on the requestee.

Ellis identified interactional, illocutionary, as well as sociolinguistic features of requests and noted that they "call for considerable 'face-work'", "for considerable

linguistic expertise on the part of the learner, they differ cross-linguistically in interesting ways and they are often realized by means of clearly identifiable formulas" (1994, p. 167-168). The scholar also provided a comprehensive review of a range of studies on requests and noted that over the past decades predominantly cross- sectional studies were conducted on comprehension of requests (Ervin-Tripp et al., 1987, cited in Ellis, 1994), perception of requests (Carrell & Konneker, 1981, cited in Ellis, 1994; Fraser et al., 1980, cited in Ellis, 1994; Olshtain & Blum-Kulka, 1985, cited in Ellis, 1994; Tanaka & Kawade, 1982, cited in Ellis, 1994; Walters, 1979, cited in Ellis, 1994). Ellis (1994) also reviewed related studies into production of requests by Scarcella (1979), Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1986), House and Kasper (1987), Tanaka (1988), Faerch and Kasper (1989), as well as Rintell and Mitchell (1989). However, the scholar noted the scarcity of longitudinal studies into the production of requests by ESL learners (Schmidt, 1983, cited in Ellis, 1994; Ellis, 1992, cited in Ellis, 1994). The research to date suggests that advanced language learners are oversensitive to the use of politeness in requestive strategies as compared to native speakers of the target language; whereas less advanced learners experience difficulties with selection of appropriate request strategies across a variety of situations; moreover, they are likely to choose less polite strategies. Importantly, even advanced language learners do not develop target-like requesting behavior (Ellis, 1994, pp. 171-174).

As regards request realization, Olshtain and Cohen (1991) proposed a speech act set of requests comprising three major strategy categories:

> the explicit impositives, the conventionalized routines, and the indirect hints. …the explicit, most direct strategies are usually realized by syntactic requests such as imperatives or other performatives (Austin, 1962); the conventionalized requests are polite realizations through conventional forms

> such as yes-no questions, with modals in English ("Could you help me?" "Would you open the window?"), and the non-conventional indirect requests form an open-ended group of hints which could be interpreted as requests under certain given situational circumstances (p. 157).

Thus, requests can be realized through the following types of strategies which are referred to as head act of the request since they can stand by themselves and function as request:

- direct (for example 'Give me some money')
- conventionally indirect (for example, 'Could you give me some money?')
- indirect strategies (for example, 'I need to make a telephone call.')

Owing to the inherently face-threatening nature of requests, indirect strategies are necessary to mitigate a requestive speech act, save face and minimize communication problems (Uso-Juan & Martinez-Flor, 2008).

Regarding pragmatic development of requests, Kasper and Rose (2002), in their review of longitudinal and cross-sectional studies on the acquisition of requests in English, outlined a series of five developmental stages as follows:

Stage 1 (Pre-basic) is typified by minimal, incomplete language, lacking structure, relational goals, and being highly context-dependent, for example,

"Me no blue."; "Sir."

Stage 2 (Formulaic) is characterized by memorized formulas, routines and frequent imperatives, for example

"Let's play the game."; "Let's eat breakfast."; "Don't look."

Stage 3 (Unpacking) exhibits incorporation of routines into productive speech, as well as emergence of mitigation in requests, for example,

"Can you pass the pencil please?"; "Can you do another one for me?"

Stage 4 (Pragmatic expansion) reflects a somewhat wider repertoire of new structures, as well as increased conventional indirectness, for example,

"Could I have another chocolate because my children –I have five children.";"Can I see it so I can copy it?"

Finally in Stage 5 (Fine tuning) more refinement of the requestee's force in relation to a given context with its goals and interlocutor(s) is noticeable, for example,

"You could put some blue tack down there." ; "Is there any more white?"

2.6.2 Recent Studies on Requests

In the past decade, an exploratory study into Japanese EFL students' performance of requestive speech acts on production questionnaires as well as through role plays was conducted by Sasaki (1997). The study found that the Japanese learners from three English proficiency levels realized requests through the direct mood derivable, want statement, as well as the conventionally indirect preparatory strategies both on the DCT and in the role play. However, the participants resorted to the direct explicit and hedged performative strategies in the questionnaire, and to the non-conventionally indirect strong hint strategy in the role play. Overall, the EFL learners exhibited intra-participant varying behavior across four request situations.

A cross-cultural study of requests of Taiwanese EFL learners was carried out by Chen and Chen (2007) through written production tasks across three request situations. The study demonstrated that the EFL learners as well as American native English speakers preferred the conventionally indirect request strategy in their

performance, especially in situations involving interlocutors of equal social status; however, they somewhat preferred this strategy in the situation with the requesters' social power inferior to that of the requestee. Impositive request strategy was found to dominate in the reverse situation, the requester's social power being superior to that of the requestee.

More recently, a range of studies explored development of pragmatic competence, with focus on requests in foreign language contexts. Woodfield (2008) conducted an empirical study into request realization by Japanese and German ESL learners and British native speaker graduate students. The study found differences between the non-native and native speakers' internal mitigation of request head acts on the Discourse Completion Task in terms of the range of linguistic strategies, as well as the nature of request perspectives used. The study, therefore, seemed to indicate that even the graduate level students may have an inadequate request strategy repertoire and require awareness-raising instruction to further their pragmatic competence. In like fashion, Otcu and Zeyrek (2008) investigated Turkish adult EFL learners' performance of requestive speech acts and compared those to native speakers' performance. Interestingly, the study did not report significant variations in the employments of external modifiers; further, it suggested lower language proficiency level learners' reliance on previously introduced formulas. Importantly, the study provided evidence of transfer likelihood on the part of higher proficiency level learners, who possess more adequate linguistic resources.

Hendricks' study (2008) is consistent with the research to date in that it also noted potential pragmatic problems in request realization in terms of intercultural

communication. Specifically, the study compared request production in relation to perceptions of situational factors such as relative power and social distance among Dutch learners of English, native speakers of Dutch, as well as native speakers of English. In this regard, the study reported similarities in the selection of requestive strategies across all three groups of participants, however variations in the linguistic resources of Dutch learners of English and those of native speakers of English in terms of lexical, phraseological as well as syntactic modification.

Barron (2008) explored an underdeveloped area of intra-linguistic pragmatic variation. The study focused on the level of directness in making requests between Irish English and English English varieties, and demonstrated similarities across two cultures in terms of requestive strategies and modifier choice. However, the study provided evidence of less directness of request head act in Irish English, especially variations in the degree of upgrading/downgrading, as well as distribution of the internal modifiers.

Importantly, Schauer's study (2008) involved German learners of English studying at British universities, German learners of English enrolled in universities in Germany as well as native British English students enrolled in British universities. The study was conducted over one academic year to examine pragmatic development in request strategy production and repertoire. Through triangulation of the requestive behavior of all groups of participants the study discussed the impact of the overseas study on students' pragmatic competence.

2.6.3 Request Studies in Iranian EFL Context

A cross-cultural study into request realization in Persian and American English was conducted by Eslamirasekh (1993). The study involved 50 native Persian speakers that provided valuable Persian baseline on requests through "open questionnaire" controlled elicitation, as well as baseline American English data. It showed evidence of more direct requestive behavior, as well as resorting to more alerters, supportive moves, and internal modifiers on the part of Persian speakers compared to American speakers. In this regard, it was noted that "in some languages like Persian, speakers may compensate for the level of directness in their requestive speech acts by using more supportive moves, alerters, and internal modifiers" (Eslamirasekh, 1993, p. 85).

Recently, Eslami and Noora (2008) focused on transferability of request strategies to corresponding English request contexts. Through a process-oriented approach to various conditions for pragmatic transfer operation, the study revealed differential transferability of the Persian request strategy, the learners' L2 proficiency not being significantly influential over their related perception. Overall, the findings suggested the influence of the interaction between the politeness and the degree of imposition involved in the request strategies over the transferability of the Persian request strategies. In line with Eslamirasekh (1993), the scholars observed that "Persian speakers performing in English might transfer the most perceptually salient form, which is the direct requesting form, from their L1 to their L2 causing pragmatic failure and miscommunications" (Eslami & Noora, 2008, p. 325).

More recently, Jalilafar (2009), in a cross-sectional study, explored Iranian EFL learners' realization of requestive speech acts. The study involved 96 undergraduate

and graduate EFL learners, as well as 10 Australian native speakers of English. Triangulation of the participants' performance on the DCT provided evidence of the Iranian language learners' pragmatic development, specifically a shift from direct to conventionally indirect strategies in making requests. However, unlike the native respondents who exhibited a more balanced production of indirect strategies, the higher proficiency EFL learners manifested overuse of the indirect strategies. Conversely, the lower proficiency level Iranian learners excessively produced direct request strategies. As regards the social variables, in terms of social power the requestive performance of the EFL learners was closer to that of the Australian native speakers of English. However, they did not appear to possess adequate sociopragmatic knowledge required for appropriate production of requests in terms of the variable of social distance.

2.7 Teaching Pragmatics

The interlanguage research to date has introduced different approaches and proposed various pedagogical practices to facilitate language learners' pragmatic competence. The pertinent findings have suggested the necessity and effectiveness of pragmatic instruction, moreover more effectiveness of explicit and deductive, rather than implicit and inductive teaching for pragmatic development of language learners (Alcon Soler & Martinez-Flor, 2008).

In the past decade, Bardovi-Harlig, Hartford, Mahan-Taylor, Morgan, and Reynolds (1991) argued for "increasing the role of pragmatics in English language instruction through integrating pragmatically appropriate language into the English classroom" and provided "guidelines for pragmatically-centred lessons" (pp. 4-5). They

maintained that enhancement of language learners' pragmatic development in relation to a given speech act/function necessitates both "a description of the use of the speech act in the target language community", as well as "an approach for developing pragmatic competence in the language classroom". In this regard, specifically, the scholars proposed the following steps:

1. identification of the speech act;
2. data collection and description;
3. text and material evaluation;
4. development of new materials (Bardovi-Harlig et al., 1991, p. 5).

Further, the scholars noted that selection of any speech act type for teaching should take into account learners' needs/interests as well as their prospective contacts through the target language. In this regard, requests can be considered for inclusion into the instructional agenda in the EFL classroom, since they are indispensable in everyone's routine communication, inside and outside the classroom.

Olshtain and Cohen (1991) suggested a framework for the teaching of speech acts in "an integrated manner", in order to help L2 learners to gain an awareness of the target socio-cultural rules as well as the cultural differences in terms of appropriate use in L1 and L2. The scholars emphasized the inadequacy of instructional materials on speech acts in that they mostly do not rely on empirical findings, rather on the materials writers' intuition, as well as being very simple and general. In this regard, Olshtain and Cohen recommended that, irrespective of instructional goals, "specification of situational and social factors matched with the most common realizations of the speech act" should be taken into account by language teachers.

The scholars proposed 5 techniques for teaching speech act including:

1. The diagnostic assessment;
2. The model dialogue;
3. The evaluation of a situation;
4. Role-play activities;
5. Feedback and discussion (1991, pp. 160-161).

However, Olshtain and Cohen cautioned language educators that speech act is "a language area in which performance is not absolute and therefore we cannot expect all learners ever to acquire perfect nativelike behavior". The ultimate goal is "the development of an awareness of sociocultural and sociolinguistic differences that might exist between one's first language and the target language", in order to minimize possible pragmatic failure(s) (1991, p. 164).

Further, Boxer and Pickering (1995) surveyed several supposedly function-focused ELT instructional materials and criticized these for their concentration on the acquisition of linguistic rather than communicative competence. They noted that "It is only when spontaneous speech is captured in authentic data that we can begin to see the underlying social strategies of speech behavior." (p. 56) Boxer and Pickering, therefore, advocated the application of sociolinguistic research findings to English language education, specifically via authentic materials presenting spontaneous speech. They emphasized that language learners need the knowledge of the following aspects of communicative competence:

> how to realize the speech act itself; what speakers' intentions are in their use of the speech act; how to respond appropriately; how to maintain cohesion

> and coherence in their part of the conversation; and how to keep the conversation flowing when their linguistic resources fail them (1995, p. 52).

Importantly, Boxer and Pickering (1995) offered a sample lesson on some speech acts based on authentic spoken data.

In a similar vein, Meier (1997) criticized ESL/EFL texts for their arbitrary selection of phrases, strategies, responses across directness-politeness or formality continuum to realize a given speech act, as well as for inadequate comments on context of use. The scholar, therefore, advocated a cultural approach to instruction of speech acts "with a refocused use of research data in a way that will make optimal use of their contextual and cultural insights" in order to enable "learners to be better 'understanders' of both their own world and others' encouraging a more positive attitude towards differences, namely, an understanding of them rather than a mere identification, which may in turn lower the barriers of stereotyping" (1997, p. 26). In line with Kramsch's (1993, cited in Meier, 1997) 'new ways' of looking at culture, Meier recommended the following classroom activities:

a. A discussion of judgments of appropriateness in context both for the learners' cultures and for the target culture;

b. Using learner observations, guided discussion, comparisons of successful and unsuccessful dialogues, and critical incidents (rather than presenting prescriptive rules) to increase learners' understanding of linguistic behavior;

c. Modifying textbook dialogues and enacting role plays to raise learners' awareness of socio-cultural factors (e.g. age, gender, social class, setting, etc.) as they inform linguistic decisions (1997, p. 26).

Furthermore, Tanaka (1997) proposed a procedural model for ESL classes, initiated by learners' discussion of their L1 sociocultural rules of speaking and completed with their generation of L2 sociocultural rules and utilization of 7 steps. Importantly, the scholar urged EFL teachers to use their creative skills for the design of activities enabling "learners to rehearse using English for real world communication" (1997, pp. 17-18). Tanaka also made some provisions for EFL contexts, in that she proposed using recorded authentic materials such as segments of videotaped television broadcasts as well as native speaker conversations, to promote learners' discussion of direct and indirect ways of making requests, to be followed up by their practice, through role play and simulation, of the targeted expressions.

Recently, Kasper (2001) reviewed studies into pragmatic instruction such as House (1996, cited in Kasper, 2001) on pragmatic fluency, Pearson (1998, cited in Kasper, 2001) on request in the Spanish as a FL context, Takahashi (2001, cited in Kasper, 2001) on request strategies in the EFL context. Related studies implemented explicit instruction, whereby a given pragmatic feature is subject to metapragmatic treatment comprising description, explanation or discussion, or implicit teaching and practice of the targeted pragmatic feature in contexts of use through various activities. Kasper (2001) observed that "A strong general trend emerging from these studies is a distinct advantage for explicit metapragmatic instruction, irrespective of such factors as the specific pragmalinguistic or sociopragmatic learning objective, L2, learners' L2 proficiency level, their L1 background, or length of instruction." (p. 515) It is noteworthy that some studies have demonstrated that traditional, teacher-fronted classrooms are not productive for learning of pragmatics (Hall, 1995, cited in Kasper, 2001; Ohta, 1995, cited in Kasper, 2001).

Importantly the following note is very encouraging for most EFL teachers:

> In order to function as L2 pragmatic socialization agents, teachers do not need to be natives of the target community. What is required is that teachers themselves have been sufficiently socialized to L2 pragmatic practices, that they can comfortably draw on those practices as part of their communicative cultural repertoire, and that their metapragmatic awareness enables them to support students' learning of L2 pragmatics effectively. (Kasper, 2001, p. 522)

Furthermore, Crandall and Basturkmen (2004), in an academic environment, observed problems with EAP speaking texts presenting lists of expressions for speech acts. They questioned the feasibility of previous suggestions by Tanaka (1997) for encouraging learners to analyze samples of authentic spoken data. The scholars, therefore, designed and conducted an evaluation of a set of pragmatics-focused instructional materials in accordance with Ellis' (1997, cited in Crandall & Basturkmen, 2004) three-way model for the empirical retrospective evaluation. They collected multiple sets of learner data: "response based (what the students do), student-based (what the students think), and learning-based (what the students learn)" (p. 40). According to the scholars, the materials employing 'a guided discovery' approach provided authentic spoken data for the learners to analyze. The major findings of the evaluation were promising in that upon completion of the instruction the learners' perceptions of the experience were positive, and those of the appropriateness of requests closer to the perceptions of the native speakers. The researchers also made some implications for the pragmatic materials design. Their sample instructional materials comprise:

1. Role play;
2. Discussion of social factors in requests;
3. Analysis of recordings of role play;
4. Class analysis of authentic data.

For example, the researchers proposed a worksheet for requests as well as strategies for changing tutorials. They took into account the following factors (adapted from Kitao et al., 1987, cited in Crandall & Basturkmen, 2004):

- relation between the requester and the requestee, specifically social distance and social power;
- size of the request;
- necessity of the request;
- normal or exception;
- how easy is the request (p. 40).

Crandall and Basturkmen (2004) thus argued for a 'better way' of speech act instruction focusing learners' attention on social factors affecting speech act realization.

More recently, Uso-Juan and Martinez-Flor (2008) reviewed current syllabi and textbooks, and noted their inadequacy due to lack of contextualized data on communicative situations. They designed a learner-based instructional method to foster EFL learners' pragmatic ability in employing request mitigating devices and help them to overcome problems in communication. The proposed method includes the following main stages, alongside samples of activities for implementation and practice in the EFL instructional context: learners' exploration, their production and subsequent feedback.

In an unorthodox fashion, Mugford (2008) argued that language teachers' instructional objective should be to prepare "learners to communicate in pleasant, not

so pleasant, and even abusive interactional and transactional situations", specifically help learners to "identify impolite practices" as well as, importantly, offer "ways of dealing with impoliteness" (p. 375). Developing language learners' awareness of impoliteness in L2 can be achieved through related discussions of "intentionality, speaker, purpose, and level of aggressiveness", with choices being "answering back with excess politeness, trying to offer an explanation…, and engaging in banter", as well as modification of the conventional instructional materials focusing only on polite interaction (Mugford, 2008, p. 381).

As regards the Iranian EFL context, Eslami-Rasekh, Eslami-Rasekh and Fatahi (2004) investigated the effect of explicit metapragmatic teaching on comprehension of speech acts by Iranian EFL students at the advanced level. The instruction was implemented through a range of pragmatically oriented activities to promote learning of several speech acts, requests inclusive. A pragmatic comprehension test in a multiple-choice format was administered to a pre- and post-design group to explore the effect of the explicit metapragmatic teaching on the Iranian students' comprehension. The findings of the study were promising in that the EFL students' pragmatic comprehension of the speech acts improved following the instruction.

In a subsequent study, Eslami-Rasekh (2005) presented and discussed, both inductively and deductively, teaching requests as one of the pragmatic features in the learners' native and target languages. The proposed activities aim, in line with Kasper (1997, cited in Eslami-Rasekh, 2005), at raising awareness, importantly providing them with analytic tools to enhance their pragmatic development. However, Eslami-Rasekh (2005) cautioned that

> It is essential that learners be informed of the various options offered by the pragmatic system of English without being coerced into making particular choices regarding those options. Second language learners may want to actively create both a new interlanguage and an accompanying identity in the learning process. (p. 207)

Eslami-Rasekh further suggested that language educators should take field notes for initiating analysis and discussion of successful and potentially problematic interactions of L2 learners, ultimately in order to raise their awareness of the pragmatic nuances in L1 and L2. The scholar noted that through a student-discovery procedure they can be encouraged to become ethnographers, who would collect data and analyze various speech acts in the environment.

More recently, international scholars and practitioners from various foreign language contexts investigated the role of pragmatics for teaching purposes, for learning purposes, as well as for testing purposes (Alcon Soler & Martinez-Flor, 2008). Regarding learning pragmatics in foreign language contexts, DuFon (2008) examined Language Socialization theory in relation to acquisition of pragmatics in FL classrooms. Tateyama and Kasper (2008) explored opportunities for learning Japanese pragmatics. Further, Hassal (2008) considered language learners' perceptions in relation to pragmatic performance. Nikula (2008) investigated learning pragmatics in content-based instructional settings, whereas Gonzales-Lloret (2008) examined computer-mediated learning of L2 pragmatics.

As regards teaching pragmatics in foreign language contexts, Kondo (2008) explored effects of awareness-raising instruction on pragmatic development of refusals by Japanese EFL learners; whilst Eslami and Eslami-Rasekh (2008) were concerned with enhancing of the pragmatic competence of non-native English-speaking teacher

candidates in an EFL instructional context. Further, House (2008) considered using translation to improve pragmatic competence.

With regard to testing pragmatics in foreign language contexts, Yamashita (2008) explored testing of interlanguage pragmatic ability. Further, Brown (2008) investigated raters, functions, item types, as well as the dependability of L2 pragmatics tests; whereas Roever (2008) examined rater, item and candidate effects in Discourse Completion Tests.

It is held that second language instruction provided through content-based as well as task-based approaches can provide multiple opportunities not only for a rich input but also a variety of interactional patterns in class, such as pair work and group work. This can promote language learners' comprehension as well as production of various communicative functions (Lightbown & Spada, 2006, p. 103). More recently, Murray (2010) advocated a deductive approach to pedagogical pragmatics envisaged developing L2 learners' appreciation of general principles backgrounding the realization and interpretation of speech acts. Importantly, deductive approach

> complements and adds depth and richness to the classroom analysis of speech acts, it also provides learners with the means to analyze and reflect on speech acts they have *not* been exposed to in their formal learning and which appear in the particular contexts in which they ultimately find themselves using the language (Murray, 2010, p. 301).

Alcon Soler and Martinez-Flor (2008), in their review of the research to date, summarized that "there is evidence indicating that pragmatics is teachable and that pedagogical intervention has a facilitative role in learning pragmatics in FL contexts"; further, "regardless of the length of the instructional period, learners receiving pragmatic instruction outperformed those who did not". Although "the

advantage of explicit over implicit instruction" was noted, more recently, the pertinent research provided "evidence for the benefits of both types of instructions" (pp. 10-11). To conclude, "Teaching pragmatics empowers students to experience and experiment with the language at a deeper level, and thereby to participate in the purpose of language communication, rather than just words." (Bardovi-Harlig et al., 1991, pp. 13-14)

2.8 Summary

This chapter presented a review of the early and current literature and studies in relation to the developing field of interlanguage pragmatics. It examined different views, as well as the research to date on pragmatic development and competence. Further, it discussed traditional views and current perspectives on the speech act theory and politeness. Finally, the chapter considered the scholarship and recent studies into requesting speech acts, as well as a range of frameworks, suggestions, and implications for teaching pragmatics.

Chapter 3

METHOD

3.1 Presentation

This chapter presents the research methodology of the study. The first sections introduce the overall research design and the research questions to be addressed. The subsequent sections describe the context, participants, as well as procedures for data collection and analysis. Finally, the last section presents the limitations and delimitations of the study.

3.2 Overall Research Design

This study aimed at investigating Iranian EFL learners' realization of requestive speech acts, specifically in terms of their pragmatic development. Rose (2000, p. 29) held that "studying pragmatic development requires …cross-sectional studies with participants at various stages of development". Accordingly, the present study was designed as a cross-sectional study involving language learners at different English proficiency levels, the Pre-intermediate, Intermediate, Upper-intermediate and Advanced levels.

Cross-sectional design is predominant in contemporary applied linguistic research and is regarded as useful in studies into pragmatic development since involvement of "significantly larger number of participants" makes "more robust generalizations possible" (Kasper & Rose, 2002, p. 141). Importantly, cross-sectional design is

"straightforward and economical" to be exploited for examination of developmental issues (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 84-85). The present study employed the most common strategy in L2 research, convenience sampling, which also involves purposefulness, in that prospective participants should "possess certain key characteristics that are related to the purpose of the investigation" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 99). It applied qualitative research procedures for data collection (administering a Discourse Completion Task, DCT, to the participants) as well as qualitative-quantitative procedures for data analysis, specifically processing, analyzing, coding of the DCT qualitative data, as well as subsequent quantification and interpretation of the coded data.

3.3 Research Questions

Accordingly, the present study addressed the following research questions:

1) How does the Iranian learners' realization of request strategies on the Discourse Completion Task compare with that of the British native speakers in terms of directness?
2) How does the EFL learners' pragmatic performance compare with that of the British native speakers in terms of the social variables of power and distance?
3) Is there evidence of the pragmatic development on the part of the Iranian learners across different English proficiency levels?

3.4 Context

The present study was conducted in the Iranian EFL context where language instruction constitutes a total of 14 of 30 hours of general schooling per week. In addition to the Persian and Arabic languages, English is offered by the Iranian

Ministry of General Education as a compulsory course due to its current status of an international language of communication, medium of instruction and language of science.

English is introduced in the 7th year of public school system and is taught throughout the remaining years. Moreover, there is a strong emphasis on English in the Iranian higher education programs by all private and state universities (Shariatmadari, 1985; Shoarinejad, 2008; Shokouhi, 1989). English is the medium of instruction at English departments offering English language teaching, English language and literature, and English translation programs; whereas other departments offer courses of Basic English, General English, and English for Specific Purposes (ESP).

It is noteworthy that English is especially popular in the private sector (Shariatmadari, 1985; Shoarinejad, 2008; Shokouhi, 1989) which is manifested by the following statistics; for instance, around 100,000 students are enrolled in a private language school, Iran Language Institute (ILI) (http://ili.com). Such popularity of English can be accounted for by various motives of Iranian citizens, who, in search for better educational and/or employment opportunities, have become increasingly mobile and have started immigrating to different English speaking countries (Hakimzadeh, 2006). It is also reported that every year more than 150,000 Iranians immigrate to other countries, especially English speaking countries such as the UK, the USA, Canada and Australia. These statistics suggest that Iranians, particularly the younger generations, usually have positive attitude towards the English language. In this regard, Moiinvaziri (2008) reported that students participating in her study were highly motivated to learn English, in terms of both

instrumental and integrative orientations. These findings are supported by Vaezi (2008), who maintains that Iranian students are highly motivated to learn English.

The present cross-sectional study was conducted at Tohid Language Institute in Tehran, which was established in 1993; its current student body is 3,000. The institute implements the following instructional resources across various proficiency levels and age groups: “Let’s go” series for young learners, “Interchange” series for teenagers and adults; “Passages” series upon completion of the previous series. The institute also offers classes for FCE, IELTS, TOEFL, Master Preparation for English Literature and English language teaching majors.

Students at the institute are streamed into their respective levels in accordance with their performance on an in-house entrance interview held by two administrators. Of 172 language instructors, 98 are female, 54 male. The teaching staff hold teaching qualifications in English studies, some of them are MA and PhD holders. The professional experience of the teaching staff varies from somewhat to very experienced language instructors.

At Tohid Language Institute an educational term lasts for about one month and language classes are offered three days a week. Each session is held for one hour and forty-five minutes. It should be noted that the English language is the only medium of instruction and interaction at the institute.

3.5 Participants

The present study involved 2 participant groups. The first group included 115 Iranian EFL learners from 4 different proficiency levels, from the Pre-Intermediate to Advanced levels at Tohid Language Institute in Tehran, Iran. The second group involved 10 British native speakers of English, residents of UK and North Cyprus. As required by research ethics, all the participants gave their consent to participate in the study (see Appendix A); they were also assigned codes to ensure confidentiality.

3.5.1 Iranian EFL learners

The first group of the participants included 115 EFL learners at the institute from four proficiency levels as follows: 20 Pre-intermediate, 20 Intermediate, 35 Upper-intermediate, 40 Advanced learners. Of 115 participants, 38 were males and 77 females; their age ranged between 15 - 35 years; their educational background varied from high school to university graduate level. Some learners had no university education; rather they enrolled in order to improve their English language proficiency. Some participants reported in the Background Information part of the Discourse Completion Task that they travelled to one or more foreign countries. Moreover, few of them reported to know other foreign languages such as French, Italian, and Spanish.

3.5.2 British Native Speakers

The second group of the participants included 10 British native speakers of English. Of 10 native speakers 6 were male, 4 female, with various academic backgrounds and professional experiences, with an age range between 34 - 69. Nine (9) participants were English teaching professionals, one taught mathematics at an

English-medium college; 7 participants held MA degrees, one was a PhD holder. The British native speakers reported to speak other languages as well such as Spanish, Turkish, French, Portuguese, and Welsh.

3.6 Data Collection Instrument

The present study employed for its research purposes a Discourse Completion Task (DCT) which is noted for the following advantages:

> Controlled methods such as the *discourse completion questionnaire* allow for large amounts of data to be collected quickly, provide information about the kinds of semantic formulas that learners use to realize different illocutionary acts, and reveal the social factors that learners think are important for speech act performance. (Ellis, 1994, p. 164)

DCT is defined as a questionnaire containing a set of very briefly described situations designed to elicit a particular speech act (Varghese & Billmyer, 1996, p. 40). Importantly, application of DCT is regarded as appropriate for the early stages of learning the communicative functions of the target language. Moreover, it provides language teachers as well as researchers "language that is less complex and less variable than natural data, but is similar enough to authentic language" (Eslami-Rasekh, 2005, p. 202).

At the start of her work on the pertinent literature and studies on the thesis topic, the researcher came across a recent cross-sectional study on requests, conducted at a state university in Iran (Jalilafar, 2009). The researcher contacted the author of the article and secured his permission to apply the DCT which proved as a reliable data collection tool in the Iranian EFL context. The DCT consists of background information part (comprising items on nationality, gender, age, the students' proficiency level, their occupation, education, duration of English language learning,

visit to an English-speaking country, as well as knowledge of other language(s). The background information part of the DCT was adapted for the British native speakers (see Appendices A and B).

The DCT comprises twenty-four situations, each situation followed by a blank space in which the participants were asked to write a request accordingly. The 24 situations are categorized into six combinations in terms of the presence or absence of the social variables of power (P) and distance (D) between interlocutors as follows (Jalilafar, 2009, p. 57).

Table 3.1 *The DCT Combinations*

Combination	P	D	Situations
A	=	+	turning down the music (1) asking for a pen (7) taking a photo (13) asking for an address (18)
B	=	-	lending some money (2) asking for notes (8) asking for lotion (14) taking care of a child (19)
C	+	+	asking for a menu (5) asking to be quiet (12) turning off the mobile phone (17) fixing the computer (22)
D	+	-	closing the window (3) presenting the paper (9) asking for some papers (20) staying more after store hours (24)
E	-	+	asking for an interview (6) participating in the course (10) rearranging the exam's day (15) giving a lift (21)
F	-	-	exchanging the shirt (4) asking for an extension (11) being out of work early (16) writing a letter (23)

Combination A comprises situations 1, 7, 13, and 18, involving interlocutors with equal social power (=P) and social distance between them (+D); whereas Combination B situations 2, 8, 14, and 19 involving interlocutors of the same status (=P), however no distance (-D). Combination C encompasses situations 5, 12, 17, and 22 with unfamiliar interlocutors (+D) and the requester of higher social power (+P); whereas Combination D consists of situations 3, 9, 20, and 24 with familiar interlocutors (-D) of unequal power (+P). Finally, combination E comprises situations 6, 10, 15, and 21, involving the less powerful requester (-P) unfamiliar with the requestee (+D); whereas combination F situations 4, 11, 16, and 23, involving familiar interlocutors (-D) and the requester with less social power (-P).

3.7 Data Collection Procedure

Initially, the researcher contacted the administration of Tohid Language Institute to secure their permission for her to conduct the research at their institution. She also requested information pertaining to their student numbers placed at different proficiency levels, as well as their time tables. The researcher prepared a schedule for data collection and left for Iran to conduct her research in Tehran, at Tohid Language Institute in February, 2010. Further, the researcher informed the administration and the teaching staff of the institute about the purpose of the research, and familiarized them with the DCT. They assisted the researcher in administering the DCT to the Iranian EFL learners in accordance with the agreed schedule.

The data collection procedure was conducted in regular English language classes. The researcher explained the instructions to the learners, in English as well as in

Persian if required; the DCT administration took approximately one hour. Owing to the absence of some of the language learners on the arranged date, the researcher secured permission to administer the DCT to these participants on another day. All the Iranian EFL learners gave their written consent to participate in the study.

The researcher's thesis supervisor assisted her in obtaining English baseline data through her academic and professional contacts in UK as well as in North Cyprus. The baseline data from the British native speakers were collected between December 2010 and January 2011. Six (6) of the participants completed the DCT on-line, 4 provided their responses manually.

3.8 Data Analysis Procedures

Administration of the DCT provided 5 sets of qualitative interlanguage data – written requests from the pre-intermediate, intermediate, upper-intermediate, advanced level Iranian EFL learners, as well as the British native speakers, respectively. The DCT data were typed up, processed and classified into files, for each proficiency level and the baseline data, respectively. The first file comprised the completed DCT responses of each Iranian learner, as well as the native speaker. In the second file the data were arranged according to the combinations (A-F) and the related situations for each participant. Finally, in file 3 the written requests were collated in terms of six combinations, for each proficiency level, and for the native speaker group, respectively (see Appendix C). The present study focused on the head act - the act actually realizing a given request.

Subsequently, the processed and filed data, specifically request head acts from the participants, were coded in accordance with a well-established manual, Cross-cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP), in terms of levels of directness (direct, conventionally indirect, and non-conventionally indirect), across 9 requestive strategies, respectively (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). The researcher conferred the coding procedure with her supervisor as well as through cross-reference to the pertinent studies.

Table 3.2 *A Summary of the CCSARP (Jalilafar, 2009)*

Level of directness	Strategy	Example
Direct	Mood derivable	"Leave me alone."
	Performatives	"I tell you to leave me alone."
	Hedged Performatives	"I would like to ask you to leave me alone."
	Obligation statements	"Sir, you'll have to move your car."
	Want statements	"I want you to move your car."
Conventionally Indirect	Suggestory formulae	"How about cleaning up?"
	Query-preparatory	"Would you mind moving your car?"
Non-conventionally Indirect	Strong hints	"The game is boring."
	Mild hints	"We've been playing this game for over an hour now."

Upon completion of the coding procedure, the qualitative interlanguage data were quantified for frequency and percentage of realization of requestive speech acts. Specifically, the instances of request strategy production from the DCT written responses were counted and converted into percentages for the Iranian EFL learners across 4 different proficiency levels, as well as for the British native speaker participant group.

3.9 Limitations and Delimitations

The present study was not without its limitations. It employed the DCT instrument for data collection, rather than other instruments such as role plays, questionnaires, or self-report elicitation tools. Further, the study was conducted at one language institute in Tehran; some respondents chose not to provide written request data in some situations on the DCT. However, the present study also had delimitations in that the employed DCT was a reliable instrument, which previously proved effective in the Iranian EFL context. Another delimitation of the study was that it applied a well established coding manual, CCSARP. Finally, this study involved an adequate sample of Iranian EFL learners, across 4 different proficiency levels, from the language institute which can be considered as representative of other similar institutes in Iran.

3.10 Summary

This chapter presented the research methodology of the present study. It introduced the cross-sectional design of the research, as well as the research questions to be addressed. Further, the chapter described the context of the study, Tohid Language Institute in Iran, the Iranian EFL and British native speaker participants, as well as

the procedures for data collection and analysis. Finally, it presented the limitations and delimitations of the study.

Chapter 4

RESULTS

4.1 Presentation

In this chapter, the results of the current study are presented. Specifically, the interlanguage request data from the Iranian EFL learners at different proficiency levels, as well as the baseline data from the British native speakers, coded in accordance with the CCSARP manual are displayed, and complemented by representative request examples from the DCT. Throughout the presentation, the native speaker and the EFL learners' performance across different proficiency levels are compared in terms of the level of directness, as well as the social variables of power and distance. This is intended to reveal developmental patterns in the Iranian language learners' realization of requestive speech acts.

4.2 Results

4.2.1 The Level of Directness

Regarding the directness level, the analysis of the interlanguage as well as the baseline data revealed the following.

The Iranian learners across all four English proficiency levels, similar to the British native speakers produced most frequently the conventionally indirect, query preparatory strategy (see Table 4.1). Further, all the participants performed the direct,

mood derivable strategy, somewhat frequently. However, although the baseline data indicated that the native speakers resorted to another, non-conventionally indirect, mild hints strategy, as their third preference, the Iranian learners resorted to another direct, want statement strategy. Interestingly, it was only the advanced level EFL learners who, similar to the native speakers, also realized their requests through the non-conventionally indirect, strong hints strategy, with less frequency though.

Table 4.1 *Realization of Request Strategies on the DCT*

Strategy	Pre-intermediate	Intermediate	Upper-intermediate	Advanced	British native speakers
Mood Derivable	85 (24.78%)	89 (21.54%)	146 (21.37%)	147 (16.91%)	12 (5.28%)
Performative				4 (0.46%)	
Hedge					1 (0.44%)
Obligation	5 (1.45%)	2 (0.48%)	8 (1.18%)	13 (1.49%)	1 (0.44%)
Want Statement	10 (2.91%)	22 (5.32%)	9 (1.31%)	14 (1.61%)	
Suggestory					1 (0.44%)
Preparatory	239 (69.67%)	295 (71.42%)	518 (75.84%)	679 (77.79%)	207 (91.18%)
Strong Hints				2 (0.23%)	2 (0.88%)
Mild Hints	4 (1.16%)	5 (1.21%)	2 (0.29%)	10 (1.15%)	3 (1.32%)
Total	343	413	683	869	227

Furthermore, the Iranian as well as the British participants also employed another direct, obligation request strategy. It should be noted that only the native speakers formulated their requests through another direct, hedge strategy, as well as the conventionally indirect, suggestory strategy; whereas only the highest, advanced level learners resorted to another direct, performative request strategy. Finally, some

instances of the non-conventionally indirect, mild hints requestive strategy, were also indentified in the interlanguage data.

As regards the social variables of power and distance the Iranian EFL learners' as well as the British native speakers' DCT data revealed the following.

4.2.2 Combination A

Combination A involves unfamiliar [+D] interlocutors of equal social power [=P]; it comprises situations 1 (turning down the music), 7 (asking for a pen), 13 (taking a photo), as well as 18 (asking for an address).

Across these situations the Iranian learners and the native speakers produced most frequently the conventionally indirect, query preparatory request strategy (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 *Realization of Request Strategies in Combination A [=P; +D]*

Strategy	Pre-intermediate	Intermediate	Upper-intermediate	Advanced	British native speakers
Mood Derivable	8 (13.33%)	10 (13.88%)	23 (18.54%)	18 (11.68%)	
Performative					
Hedge					
Obligation	1 (1.66%)				
Want Statement		1 (1.38%)			
Suggestory					
Preparatory	50 (83.33%)	60 (83.33%)	101 (81.45%)	135 (87.66%)	40 (100%)
Strong Hints					
Mild Hints	1 (1.66%)	1 (1.38%)		1 (0.64%)	
Total	60	72	124	154	40

Some illustrative examples are given below.

Conventionally indirect, query preparatory request strategy

"May I use your pen?" [Pre-intermediate learner]

"Can I use your pen?" [Intermediate learner]

"Could you please give me your pen?" [Upper-intermediate learner]

"Would you mind if I borrow your pen?" [Advanced learner]

"Could I borrow your pen for a moment?" [British native speaker]

Further, the EFL learners across different proficiency levels resorted to the direct, mood derivable request strategy, as their second choice. Furthermore, few instances of the non-conventionally indirect, mild hints strategy, were identified in the interlanguage data of the pre-intermediate, intermediate and advanced learners. Moreover, few instances of other direct, obligation and want statement request strategies, appeared in the production of the pre-intermediate and intermediate learners, respectively.

Some illustrative examples are given below.

Direct, obligation request strategy

"You should turn down the music." [Pre-intermediate learner]

Direct, want statement request strategy

"I want you to turn the music down." [Intermediate learner]

4.2.3 Combination B

Combination B involves the requestee and the requester of equal social power [=P], familiar with each other [-D]; it includes situations 2 (lending some money), 8 (asking for notes), 14 (asking for lotion), as well as 19 (taking care of a child).

Across these situations, similar to combination A, the Iranian EFL learners as well as the British native speakers realized most frequently the conventionally indirect, query preparatory request strategy (see Table 4.3). The EFL learners also formulated their requests through the direct, mood derivable strategy, as their second preference. It should be noted that it was some of the lowest, pre-intermediate level learners, who also resorted to another direct, want statement strategy. Interestingly, few instances of the non-conventionally indirect, mild hints strategy, were identified in the interlanguage data from the pre-intermediate and advanced learners.

Table 4.3 *Realization of Request Strategies in Combination B [=P; -D]*

Strategy	Pre-intermediate	Intermediate	Upper-intermediate	Advanced	British native speakers
Mood Derivable	10 (14.92%)	6 (8.10%)	15 (12.39%)	6 (3.84%)	
Performative					
Hedge					
Obligation					
Want Statement	2 (2.98%)	1 (1.35%)			
Suggestory					
Preparatory	53 (79.10%)	67 (90.54%)	106 (87.60%)	149 (95.51%)	38 (100%)
Strong Hints					
Mild Hints	2 (2.98%)			1 (0.64%)	
Total	67	74	121	156	38

Some illustrative examples are given below.

Non-conventionally indirect, mild hints requestive strategy

"I forgot to bring my lotion." [Pre-intermediate learner]

"This is my favorite singer, I love him." [Advanced learner]

4.2.4 Combination C

Combination C involves the requester of relatively higher social power [+P], unfamiliar with the requestee [+D]; it comprises situations 5 (asking for a menu), 12 (asking to be quiet), 17 (turning off the mobile phone), as well as 22 (fixing the computer).

Across the related situations, the Iranian EFL learners, except the pre-intermediate level, and unlike the British native speakers, produced the conventionally indirect, query-preparatory, as well as the direct, mood derivable request strategies, with almost similar frequency rate (see Table 4.4). The lowest level EFL learners were

Table 4.4 *Realization of Request Strategies in Combination C [+P; +D]*

Strategy	Pre-intermediate	Intermediate	Upper-intermediate	Advanced	British native speakers
Mood Derivable	38 (59.37%)	34 (45.94%)	54 (46.15%)	68 (44.44%)	7 (18.42%)
Performative				3 (1.96%)	
Hedge					
Obligation	1 (1.56%)	2 (2.70%)	4 (3.41%)	9 (5.88%)	1 (2.63%)
Want Statement	2 (3.12%)	1 (1.35%)	3 (2.56%)		
Suggestory					
Preparatory	23 (35.93%)	35 (47.29%)	56 (47.86%)	72 (47.05%)	28 (73.68%)
Strong Hints				1 (0.65%)	2 (5.26%)
Mild Hints		2 (2.70%)			
Total	64	74	117	153	38

most direct , whereas the native speakers least direct in their requesting behavior across the related situations. Further, some of the Iranian learners and native speakers also realized their requests through another direct, obligation strategy. It is noteworthy that it was only the highest, advanced level learners, who formulated few of their requests through yet another direct, performative strategy, as well as, similar to the native speakers, the non-conventionally indirect, strong hints strategy.

Furthermore, few instances of yet another direct, want statement strategy, were identified in the interlanguage data of the pre-intermediate, intermediate, upper-intermediate learners, respectively, as well as few instances of the non-conventionally indirect, mild hints strategy, in the performance of the intermediate learners.

An illustrative example is given below.

Non-conventionally indirect, mild hints requestive strategy

"Here is a library and all the students are studying." [Intermediate learner]

4.2.5 Combination D

Combination D involves the requester of higher social power [+P], familiar with the requestee [-D]; it includes situations 3 (closing the window), 9 (presenting the paper), 20 (asking for some papers), as well as 24 (staying more after store hours).

Table 4.5 *Realization of Request Strategies in Combination D [+P; -D]*

Strategy	Pre-intermediate	Intermediate	Upper-intermediate	Advanced	British native speakers
Mood Derivable	24 (45.28%)	20 (30.76%)	40 (36.36%)	43 (31.61%)	4 (10.81%)
Performative					
Hedge					
Obligation	2 (3.77%)		4 (3.63%)	4 (2.94%)	
Want Statement	3 (5.66%)	10 (15.38%)	2 (1.81%)	5 (3.67%)	
Suggestory					1 (2.70%)
Preparatory	24 (45.28%)	34 (52.30%)	63 (57.27%)	82 (60.29%)	31 (83.78%)
Strong Hints				1 (0.73%)	
Mild Hints		1 (1.53%)	1 (0.09%)	1 (0.73%)	1 (2.70%)
Total	53	65	110	136	37

Across the related situations, except the pre-intermediate level, the Iranian EFL learners, as well as the British native speakers realized relatively more frequently conventionally indirect, query preparatory request strategy (see Table 4.5).

Interestingly, the lowest level EFL learners performed the query preparatory and the mood derivable strategies with the same frequency rate; the other proficiency level learners, as well as the native speakers resorted to the mood derivable strategy somewhat frequently.

It should be noted that few instances of another direct, want statement strategy, were identified in the interlanguage data across all proficiency levels, as well as few instances of another direct, obligation strategy, in the production of the pre-intermediate, upper-intermediate, as well as advanced levels. Interestingly, the

British native speakers formulated some of their requests through another conventionally indirect, suggestory strategy, as well as the non-conventionally indirect, mild hints strategy, with the same frequency rate. Furthermore, single instances of the mild hints strategy realization were identified in the interlanguage data of the intermediate, upper-intermediate, and advanced learners, whereas a single instance of another conventionally indirect, strong hints strategy, was observed only in the performance of the highest proficiency level learners. Some illustrative examples are given below.

Conventionally indirect, suggestory strategy

"How about closing it again?" [British native speaker]

Non-conventionally indirect, strong hints strategy

"Don't you understand it's cold?" [Advanced learner]

4.2.6 Combination E

Combination E involves the requester of relatively lower social power [-P], unfamiliar with the requestee [+D]; it comprises situations 6 (asking for an interview), 10 (participating in the course), 15 (rearranging the exam's day), as well as 21 (giving a lift).

Across the related situations the Iranian EFL learners as well as the British native speakers realized the conventionally indirect, query preparatory request strategy highly frequently (see Table 4.6). Further, the intermediate as well as upper-

Table 4.6 *Realization of Request Strategies in Combination E [-P; +D]*

Strategy	Pre-intermediate	Intermediate	Upper-intermediate	Advanced	British native speakers
Mood Derivable	2 (4.76%)	10 (16.12%)	10 (9.80%)	6 (4.65%)	1 (2.56%)

Performative					
Hedge					
Obligation	1 (2.38%)				
Want Statement	1 (2.38%)	5 (8.06%)	1 (0.98%)	6 (4.65%)	
Suggestory					
Preparatory	37 (88.09%)	46 (74.19%)	90 (88.23%)	112 (86.82%)	36 (92.3 %)
Strong Hints					
Mild Hints	1 (2.38%)	1 (1.61%)	1 (0.98%)	5 (3.87%)	2 (5.12%)
Total	42	62	102	129	39

intermediate EFL learners also produced the direct, mood derivable strategy, somewhat frequently; whereas the pre-intermediate level and advanced level learners less frequently. Furthermore, the lowest level learners also exhibited single instances of 2 other direct, obligation and want statement strategy production. Moreover, few instances of the want statement strategy performance were also identified in the interlanguage data of the intermediate, upper-intermediate, as well as advanced learners. Interestingly, the highest, advanced level learners resorted to the mood derivable, as well as the want statement request strategies with the same frequency rate. Few instances of the non-conventionally indirect, mild hints strategy, were observed both in the interlanguage and the baseline data. It is noteworthy that the British native speakers were consistently least direct in their requesting behavior.

An illustrative example is given below.

Direct, obligation requestive strategy

"You have to help me." [Pre-intermediate learner]

4.2.7 Combination F

Combination F involves the requester of relatively lower social power [-P], familiar with the requestee [-D]; it includes situations 4 (exchanging the shirt), 11 (asking for an extension), 16 (being out of work early), as well as 23 (writing a letter).

Table 4.7 *Realization of Request Strategies in Combination F [-P; -D]*

Strategy	Pre-intermediate	Intermediate	Upper-intermediate	Advanced	British native speakers
Mood Derivable	3 (5.26%)	9 (13.63%)	4 (3.66%)	6 (4.28%)	
Performative					
Hedge					1 (2.85%)
Obligation					
Want Statement	2 (3.50%)	4 (6.06%)	3 (2.75%)	3 (2.14%)	
Suggestory					
Preparatory	52 (91.22%)	53 (80.30%)	102 (93.57%)	129 (92.14%)	34 (97.14%)
Strong Hints					
Mild Hints				2 (1.42%)	
Total	57	66	109	140	35

Across these situations, similar to combination E, the Iranian EFL learners as well as the British native speakers produced the conventionally indirect, query preparatory request strategy, highly frequently (see Table 4.7). Interestingly, the native speakers did not employ the direct, mood derivable strategy, whereas the EFL learners formulated some of their requests through this strategy, the intermediate learners did so somewhat frequently though.

A single instance of another direct, hedge strategy, was observed in the baseline data, whereas few instances of yet another direct, want statement strategy, were identified

in the interlanguage data. Finally, it was only the highest, advanced level Iranian learners, who resorted to the non-conventional indirectness in this combination.

4.3 Summary

Throughout this chapter, the results of the analysis of 5 sets of the interlanguage data, the DCT data from the Iranian EFL learners across 4 different proficiency levels, as well as from the British native speakers of English were presented. Subsequently, the interlanguage data were compared with the baseline data, in terms of the level of directness in order to reveal evidence of pragmatic development of requestive speech acts on the part of the EFL learners. Further, all sets of the data were compared across six combinations involving interlocutors with varying social factors of relative power and distance, in order to explore the Iranian learners' related awareness and competence in realization of appropriate request strategies.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Presentation

In this chapter, the major findings of the present cross-sectional study are presented across different English language proficiency levels, from the pre-intermediate to the advanced levels. Further, these findings are discussed in relation to the pertinent literature and studies, with a particular reference to the Iranian EFL instructional context. The discussion is followed up with a summary, pedagogical implications, as well as suggestions for prospective research.

5.2 Discussion of Major Findings

The major findings of the present cross-sectional study on Iranian EFL learners' realization of requestive speech acts, specifically in terms of pragmatic development are as follows. Tables 5.1 and 5.2 illustrate the collated interlanguage as well as baseline data on request strategy realization, respectively.

5.2.1 Pre-intermediate Level

The interlanguage data based on the lowest, pre-intermediate level Iranian language learners' realization of requests revealed their related pragmatic repertoire. Of all the learners these EFL learners were most direct in their requesting behavior, resorting to direct strategies more frequently (29.14%) than the other EFL learners (see Table 5.1).

Further, the evidence of somewhat similar degree of frequency in their direct strategy performance, 9.52% and 8.76% in combinations E and F, respectively, (see Table 5.2) seemed to indicate the pre-intermediate learners' inadequate sensitivity to the social distance between interlocutors. However, their direct request production in combinations A and B demonstrated a somewhat different picture (14.99% and 17.9%), respectively.

Furthermore, the lowest level learners appeared to have adequate pragmatic awareness and competence to formulate appropriate requests in terms of the social variable of power, manifested by the pertinent interlanguage data on combinations D and C, with the increased degree of directness (54.71% and 64.05%, respectively) on the part of the requester of relatively higher social power. Since the pre- intermediate

Table 5.1 *Request Strategy Realization at the Level of Directness*

Level	Participants				
	Pre-intermed.	Intermed.	Upper-intermed.	Advanced	British native speakers
Direct request strategies (D)	29.14%	27.34%	23.86%	20.47%	6.16%
Convent.indirect request strategies (CI)	69.67%	71.42%	75.84%	77.79%	91.62%
Non-convent. indirect request strategies (NCI)	1.16%	1.21%	0.29%	1.38%	2.20%

Iranian learners exhibited more directness than the other, higher level learners; it is conceivable that these lower level learners still somewhat relied on their L1-based pragmatic knowledge and conventions, their frequency of conventionally indirect strategy realization being the lowest, 69.67%, across different proficiency levels.

One of the promising findings in relation to this level was that they occasionally resorted to the non-conventionally indirect strategy in combinations A, B, and E.

Table 5.2 *Request Strategy Realization across Combinations A-F*

Combinations with varying social power and distance	Participants/ Request strategies				
	Pre-intermediate	Intermediate	Upper-intermediate	Advanced	British
A(1,7,13,18) =P +D	D 14.99% CI 83.33% NCI 1.66%	D 15.26% CI 83.33% NCI 1.38%	D 18.54% CI 81 45% NCI -	D 11.68% CI 87.66% NCI 0.64%	D – CI 100% NCI -
B(2,8,14,19) =P –D	D 17.9% CI 79.10% NCI 2.98%	D 9.45% CI 90.54% NCI -	D 12.39% CI 87.60% NCI -	D 3.84% CI 95.51% NCI 0.64%	D – CI 100% NCI -
C(5,12,17,22) +P +D	D 64.05% CI 35.93% NCI -	D 49.99% CI 47.29% NCI 2.70%	D 52.12% CI 47.86% NCI -	D 52.28% CI 47.05% NCI 0.65%	D 21.05% CI 73.6% NCI 5.2%
D(3,9,20,24) +P -D	D 54.71% CI 45.28% NCI -	D 46.14% CI 52.30% NCI 1.53%	D 41.8% CI 57.27% NCI 0.09%	D 38.22% CI 60.29% NCI 1.46%	D 10.81% CI 86.4% NCI 2.7%
E(6,10,15,21) -P +D	D 9.52% CI 88.09% NCI 2.38%	D 24.18% CI 74.19% NCI 1.61%	D 10.78% CI 88.23% NCI 0.98%	D 9.3% CI 86.82% NCI 3.87%	D 2.56% CI 92.3% NCI 5.1%
F(4,11,16,23) -P -D	D 8.76% CI 91.22% NCI -	D 19.69% CI 80.30% NCI -	D 6.41% CI 93.57% NCI -	D 6.42% CI 92.14% NCI 1.42%	D 2.85% CI 97.1% NCI -

Overall, the pre-intermediate level EFL learners appeared to possess somewhat adequate pragmatic competence for realization of requestive speech acts in the target language.

5.2.2 Intermediate Level

The DCT performance data on the Intermediate level Iranian learners, as compared to the lowest, pre-intermediate learners' data revealed a somewhat similar pragmatic repertoire. However, these learners opted for relatively less directness in their requesting behavior, the frequency of direct strategy realization being 27.34% (see Table 5.1). Interestingly, similar to the lower level learners, the intermediate learners exhibited most directness in combinations D and C; however, unlike the pre-intermediate level learners, least directness in combinations B and A. Specifically, the intermediate learners performed direct request strategies with frequency similar to that of the pre-intermediate learners in combination A, 15.26%; however, almost twice less frequently in combination B, 9.45% (see Table 5.2). Further, these EFL learners realized more direct strategies, compared to the lowest level, towards the unfamiliar rather than the familiar requestee on the part of the requester of relatively lower social power, in combinations E and F (24.18% and 19.69%, respectively). Furthermore, in the same vein, they resorted to even more directness in combinations C and D, with the more powerful requester towards the unfamiliar (49.99%) rather than the familiar requestee (46.14%), respectively.

Although these EFL learners appeared to possess a pragmatic repertoire similar to that of the pre-intermediate level learners, they formulated some of their requests through the non-conventionally indirect strategy with more frequency (1.21%) than

the pre-intermediate learners (1.16%). Moreover, the intermediate learners seemed to have better pragmatic awareness and resources to vary their requests in terms of the conventional indirectness (71.42%) than the pre-intermediate level learners (69.67%), as manifested by their related performance on the DCT.

5.2.3 Upper-intermediate Level

The interlanguage request data on the upper-intermediate level Iranian learners, interestingly, revealed a somewhat less varying pragmatic repertoire that that of the pre-intermediate and intermediate learners, although these higher level learners were less direct in their requesting behavior (23.86%) (see Table 5.1). Specifically, the upper-intermediate learners exhibited most directness, similar to the other levels, in combinations D and C, and, similar to the pre-intermediate level, least directness in combinations F and E. Interestingly, these EFL learners formulated their requests somewhat more directly than the pre-intermediate and intermediate level learners in combinations A and B (see Table 5.2). Further, similar to the intermediate level learners, the upper-intermediate learners resorted to more directness toward the unfamiliar rather than the familiar requestee of equal power in combinations A (8.54%) and B (12.39%), as well as toward the unfamiliar rather than the familiar requestee of more social power in combinations E (10.78%) and F (6, 41%).

It warranted attention that these higher level EFL learners formulated some of their requests through the non-conventionally indirect strategy less frequently (0.29%) than the intermediate level, as well as, interestingly, the lowest, pre-intermediate level learners. Overall, the upper-intermediate level learners appeared to shift to

more conventional indirectness in their realization of requests (75.84%) and were closer to the advanced level learners in this regard.

5.2.4 Advanced Level

The DCT performance data on the highest, advanced level Iranian learners manifested a somewhat more balanced pragmatic repertoire. It is noteworthy that of all the EFL learners they were least direct in their requesting behavior (20.47%). Further, they resorted to most directness, similar to the other language learners, in combinations D and C, to least directness in combinations F and B. Interestingly, the direct request production of these learners was somewhat similar to that of the upper-intermediate learners in combinations E (9.30%) and F (6.42%), respectively, as well as in combinations C (52.58%) and D (38.22%). Furthermore, similar to the intermediate and upper-intermediate learners, the advanced learners resorted to more directness towards the unfamiliar rather than the familiar requestee across all combinations. The DCT evidence on the highest level learners suggested their adequate grammatical as well as pragmatic competence, and sensitivity to the social variable of power.

Moreover, only the advanced level learners appeared to possess in their pragmatic repertoire not only the non-conventionally indirect, mild hints, but also, similar to the native speakers, strong hints request strategy. Overall, the advanced level learners, compared to the other levels, were most indirect, both in terms of conventional (77.79%) as well as non-conventional (1.38%) indirectness, in their realization of requests. However, comparison of their pragmatic performance to that of the native speakers suggested that although it was closer to that of the British participants, the

advanced level EFL learners required further pragmatic development towards the native-like realization of requests.

Our findings of the pragmatic development of the Iranian EFL learners are mostly consistent with the findings of Jalilafar (2009) in that there was evidence of developmental patterns in request realization toward indirectness across different English proficiency levels in both studies. In this regard, Hill's (1997) study conducted in the Japanese EFL context also revealed that low-proficiency group, unlike the advanced one, relied mostly on direct requests. However, the EFL learners' requesting behavior in the current study was less direct than that of the learners in Jalilafar's study.

In relation to requests, it was noted in the pertinent literature that "imperatives are rarely used to …request", therefore, "*most* usages [of requests] are indirect" (Levinson, 1983, p. 275, 264). It was reiterated more recently that "the occurrence of the imperative in…requests is dispreferred in many languages, including English, despite its status as the 'genuine' expression of speech act…[of] 'request'" Mey (2007, p. 133). Importantly, "In Britain 'politeness' is typically used to describe negative politeness, which is presumed to be 'a good thing'…" (Grundy, 2008, p. 202).

It is noteworthy that languages exhibit differences in terms of directness in realization of speech acts (Bialystok, 1993). In this regard, the Persian baseline data revealed that "in some languages like Persian, speakers may compensate for the level of directness in their requestive speech acts by using more supportive moves,

alerters, and internal modifiers" (Eslamirasekh, 1993, p. 85). Direct strategies in request realization, therefore, are "highly conventionalized and thus frequently used in Persian" (Eslami & Noora, 2008, p. 324). Consequently since "the functional equivalence of L1 and L2 conventions is often unclear to learners", Iranian EFL learners face difficulties in resorting to conventional indirectness (Eslami & Noora, 2008, p. 321).

Therefore, evidence of a shift towards the conventional indirectness in the present study, from the lowest to the highest English proficiency levels, can be accounted for by the lower level Iranian learners' resort to linguistically less complex direct strategies, conversely, by the advanced level learners' internalization of the target-like indirect requestive conventions, as well as parallels between language learners' pragmatic development and their proficiency level (Rose, 2000). As Otcu and Zeyrek (2008, p. 289) reported in a recent exploratory study in the Turkish EFL context, "proficiency level is important in the development of requesting strategies in an EFL context". Interestingly, the most preferred conventionally indirect strategy, in Jalilafar's (2009) as well as in the present cross-sectional studies, was query-preparatory, which is also in line with Otcu and Zeyrek (2008). In this regard, Kasper and Rose (2002, p. 135) consider movement "from reliance on routine formulas in the earliest stages of development to a gradual introduction of analyzed, productive language use" as one of the general characteristics of L2 request development.

Interestingly, the Iranian EFL learners in this study exhibited more indirect pragmatic performance than the learners in Jalilafar's (2009) study, which can be attributed to the kind of language instruction they received, at one of the large

English language institutes and a state University in Iran, respectively. It should also be noted that, according to Mansoori (1999, cited in Eslami & Noora, 2008), the English instructional materials in Iran emphasize the query-preparatory requestive strategy. In this regard, the advanced level learners in the current study predominantly resorted to this particular conventionally indirect strategy. However, the research to date cautions that "we often cannot precisely tell whether a particular IL performance is a result of language transfer, IL overgeneralization, or transfer of training" (Eslami & Noora, 2008, p. 324). It also warranted attention that the interlanguage data in both, the current and Jalilafar's (2009) studies, provided only minimal evidence of the EFL learners' pragmatic performance in terms of the demanding, highly inferential non-conventional indirectness across different English proficiency levels, which is also supported by the results of Otcu and Zeyrek (2008).

As regards the Iranian learners' awareness of and pragmatic production in terms of the social variables, the present study, in line with Jalilafar's (2009) study, revealed mostly adequate pragmatic competence in relation to the varying social power of interlocutors. Specifically, the interlanguage data in this study revealed a developmental pattern in request realization towards less indirectness on the part of the more powerful requester, conversely, more indirectness in the event of the less powerful requester. However, the EFL learners' requesting behavior seemed to indicate inadequate pragmatic competence in relation to the varying social distance between the requester and the requestee in that they did not consistently exhibit required sensitivity toward familiar/unfamiliar interlocutor.

Overall, the highest level learners' production of requests in the current study, as well as in Jalilafar's study, was closer to that of the native speakers, which is in line with Trosborg's (1995) study reporting that language learners with higher proficiency approximated more closely to native-like requestive performance. However, the Iranian EFL learners at the advanced level required further development of their pragmatic competence, which was also noted by the research to date (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Ellis, 1994), as well as supported by the recent findings of Persian learners' reliance on L1 request conventions in L2 requesting behavior, regardless of their English proficiency level (Eslami & Noora, 2008, p. 322).

Finally, the findings of the present study can also be accounted for by the fact that due to the test-driven and structurally-based nature of the EFL curriculum in the Iranian instructional context, "the likelihood of learners getting any specific explicit instruction on pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic realization of requestive speech acts is slim" (Eslami & Noora, 2008, p. 324). Therefore, language instruction should promote "learners' intake of pragmatic issues" in the target language by "enhancing the relationship between pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic aspects of language" (Alcon Soler & Martinez-Flor, 2008, p. 12). However, whether EFL learners are willing or need to conform to pragmatic norms of the target language in their performance is a sensitive as well as critical issue (Eslami-Rasekh et al., 1993, p. 10).

5.3 Summary

The present cross-sectional study explored Iranian learners' realization of requestive speech acts. Specifically, the study examined the requestive behavior of Iranian EFL

learners from four different English proficiency levels in terms of directness, as well as the social variables of power and distance to reveal their pragmatic development, if any, in the target language learning.

To this end, a Discourse Completion Task (Jalilafar, 2009), as well as CCSARP manual (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989) were employed to elicit and code requestive interlanguage data from 115 Iranian EFL learners, as well as English baseline data from 10 British English native speakers, respectively.

The study findings revealed that there was evidence of pragmatic development across different English proficiency levels of the Iranian learners in terms of directness. Specifically, the interlanguage data manifested a gradual decline in direct strategy realization of requests from the highest to the lowest English proficiency levels. Conversely, the DCT data provided evidence of a gradual increase in conventionally indirect request strategy performance, from the pre-intermediate to the advanced level. These findings suggested developmental patterns in the EFL learners' pragmatic competence, with an emerging shift towards non-conventional indirectness across different English proficiency levels. The Iranian learners also exhibited adequate sensitivity and performance in request realization in terms of the situational variable of power.

However, overall in terms of the strategy selection and frequency of strategy use, as well as the social variable of distance the EFL learners exhibited requestive performance somewhat different from that of the native speakers. In this regard, the advanced level learners, compared to the other levels, showed requestive production

closer to that of the British participants. Yet, the Iranian learners at this and other English proficiency levels required further development of their pragmalinguistic as well as sociopragmatic competence.

5.4 Pedagogical Implications

The present study contributes to the growing research on Interlanguage Pragmatics, specifically on pragmatic development of requests on the part of learners in EFL contexts. Given scarcity of cross-sectional studies into Iranian EFL learners' realization of speech acts, this study provides interlanguage data on requests as well as pertinent baseline data from British native speakers; it also offers pedagogical implications for the Iranian EFL context. Specifically, the study provides insights into Iranian language learners' awareness and performance of requestive speech acts at different English proficiency levels. Importantly, it manifests their somewhat inadequate sensitivity to and production of appropriate requests across varying social contexts, especially as regards the social variable of distance. The study, therefore, suggests the necessity for the language institute to address this particular gap in their language learners' pragmatic competence, and, if need be, revise their instructional materials on offer, as well as reconsider related pedagogical practices.

Furthermore, somewhat limited pragmatic repertoire of Iranian EFL learners seems to require explicit metapragmatic teaching of speech acts in general, requests – an indispensable act in our daily communicative behavior - in particular. The findings also necessitate introduction of authentic spoken data into EFL classrooms. Moreover, some instances of the Iranian learners' realization of requestive speech acts suggest that they might not have been accurately placed to their respective

proficiency levels, or might have been promoted to that level earlier than required. This observation also seems to indicate the necessity to reconsider the content and structure of the in-house entrance interview, as well as end-of-the term assessment procedure. It is hoped that other English language institutes in Iran will benefit from the findings as well as pedagogical implications of this cross-sectional study into Iranian EFL learners' realization of requestive speech acts. Importantly, language educators should bear in mind that

> The adoption of socio-cultural rules as one's own in L2 pragmatic production is an individual decision. However, it is our responsibility to equip the learners with enough knowledge to make an informed choice and to not inadvertently convey messages they did not intend. (Eslami-Rasekh et al., 1993, p. 10)

5.5 Suggestions for Further Research

The current study makes the following suggestions. Prospective research into Iranian EFL learners' pragmatic development can consider a longitudinal design in order to examine their developmental process. Further, it can undertake exploration of their perception as well as production of requestive speech acts. Furthermore, in addition to request head acts, follow-up studies can examine the lexico-grammatical complexity, as well as external and internal mitigation devices in language learners' oral/written realization of requests. Finally, prospective research can employ a variety of data collection tools, such as recording authentic interaction or elicited conversations (open and closed role-plays); multiple-choice questionnaires and scaled-response formats; as well as diaries and verbal protocols (Alcon Soler & Martinez-Flor, 2008) in order to obtain a comprehensive set of data on Iranian EFL learners' pragmatic perception, comprehension, interpretation as well as production.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Discourse Completion Task for Iranian EFL Learners

Dear student,

I am investigating communicative competence of the EFL learners at Tohid Language Institute. You are, therefore, requested to complete a discourse completion task. The data collected through this tool will be used for research purposes only. I assure you that your identity and related information will be confidential. If you agree to participate in this research please fill in the consent form below.

Solmaz Taghizade Mahani

Master candidate

Department of English Language Teaching

Faculty of Education

Eastern Mediterranean University

Spring 2010

Consent form

I understand what this research is about and how my data will be used. Thus, by signing below, I give my consent to participate in it.

Name/Surname:

St. Number:

Signature

Date: / /2010

Background information

Fill in the blanks or put (×) where necessary.

Nationality:

Gender: male ( ) female ( )

Age:

Current level: Pre-intermediate ( ) Intermediate ( )

Upper-intermediate ( ) Advanced ( )

Occupation:

Education: high school ( ) BA ( ) MA ( ) PhD ( )

How long have you been studying English?

Have you ever been to an English speaking country? If yes, how long?

Do you speak any other language(s) in addition to English? If yes, please specify.

Why do you want to learn English? (e.g. job, further education, travelling,……..)

Discourse Completion Task

Please read the following descriptions of situations and write what you would say in each situation.

1) You are trying to study in your room and hear loud music coming from another student's room down the hall. You don't know the student, but you decide to ask him/her to turn the music down. What would you say?

---

2) You are at the record store with your best friend. There's a CD you really want to buy, but you don't have any money. How do you ask your friend to lend you money?

---

3) 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 would you say?

---

4) You have bought a shirt from a big store for your father, but he doesn't like its color. You decide to go to the clothes store and ask the manager of the store to allow you to exchange the shirt. What would you say?

---

5) Your friend and you go to a restaurant to eat. You want to order and need to ask the waiter for the menu. What would you say?

---

6) You are writing your thesis and need to interview the president of a university whom you don't know. You know the president is very busy, but still want to ask him/her to spare one or two hours for your interview. What would you say?

---

7) For registration you need to fill out a couple of forms. You search all of your pockets and cannot find a pen. You want to ask another student who is sitting next to you in the department hall. What would you say?

---

8) You were absent last Friday history class that you are enrolled in. So you decide to borrow your friend's notes to catch up with the rest of the class. What would you say to get this friend to lend you the notes?

---

9) You are a professor teaching a course in psychology. You want one of the students who is very competent and always contributes to class discussion, to present a paper in a class a week earlier than scheduled. However, midterm exams are next week and she has a heavy course load. What would you say?

---

10) You really have to take this course in order to graduate, but you found that the course is already closed. So, you decide to ask the professor, whom you don't know, to allow you to take this course. What would you say to get this professor to permit you to participate in this course?

---

11) You have a paper due in one of your classes next week. However, you will be very busy this week and don't have any time to write it. You go to your

professor's office to ask for more time to write the paper. How do you request an extension?

---

12) You are a librarian. Today a student is making a noise and disturbing other students. You don't know that student. However, you decide to ask the student to quiet down. What would you say?

---

13) A friend of yours from out of the town is paying you a visit. Both of you would like to take a photo together to remember this happy moment. You decide to ask a nearby person who is a stranger to you, to do this favor. What would you say?

---

14) You and your friend are members of the college skiing club. You have just arrived at the mountain and see that your friend is applying sunscreen lotion. You want to use that lotion because you have forgotten to bring your own. How would you ask your friend?

---

15) Your English midterm exam is approaching, and you find that the date of the test is the same as that of your brother's wedding. You decide to ask the professor whom you don't know personally to rearrange another day especially for you to take this test. What would you say?

---

16) Your mother will be visiting from out of town and you want to pick her up at the airport. However, her flight arrives at 3:00 p.m., but you have to work until 5:00 p.m. How do you ask your boss to let you out of work early?

---

17) You are a teacher. It's the beginning of the semester and you don't know the students yet. In class, the mobile phone of one of your students rings. You want to ask him/her to turn off the mobile phone. What would you say?

---

18) You are going to visit your friend, who lives in the college dormitory. You are on the campus, but you don't know where the room is. You are going to ask a student for the location of the dorm. How would you ask the student?

---

19) It's 7:00 a.m. and you want to go to work. You have to leave your daughter alone because her babysitter is late. You decide to ask your friend, who lives in your neighborhood to take care of your little daughter in the meanwhile. What would you say?

---

20) You are the manager of a company. You are in the meeting with the other members of your company. You need to write some notes, but you realize that you don't have any paper. You turn to the person sitting next to you and you know him/her very well. What would you say?

---

21) Your class has just finished and you need a ride home. Your fellow classmate who was supposed to give you a ride is absent. As you come out of the class, you see an assistant professor. You decide to ask him/her to give a lift to you. What would you say?

---

22) You are the president of a university. Something is wrong with your computer. You have to finish some work which is due tomorrow. One of the students is very skillful in fixing computers. You don't know him/her. However, you want to ask him/her to fix your computer. What would you say?

---

23) You are applying for a scholarship, and you decide to ask a professor, who knows you very well as your academic advisor, to write a recommendation letter for you. What would you say to ask him/her to do this favor for you?

---

24) You are the owner of a big bookstore. It is the beginning of the semester, and you are very busy. Today you want to extend business hours by an hour. So, you decide to ask your clerk whom you know quite well, to stay after store hours. What would you say?

THANK YOU…

Appendix B: Discourse Completion Task for British Native Speakers

Dear Respondent,

I am investigating communicative competence of Iranian EFL learners for my MA Thesis research and I need baseline data from native speakers of English. I will, therefore, appreciate it if you could complete a DCT (Discourse Completion Task) below. Please note that prospective data will be used for research purposes only.

Solmaz Taghizade Mahani

MA candidate

ELT Department

Faculty of Education

Eastern Mediterranean University

Fall 2010

Background information

Fill in the blanks or put (×) where necessary.

Nationality:

Gender: male ( ) female ( )

Age:

Occupation:

Education: high school ( ) BA ( ) MA ( ) PhD ( )

Do you speak any other language(s) in addition to English? If yes, please specify.

Discourse Completion Task

Please read the following descriptions of situations and write what you would say in each situation.

1) You are trying to study in your room and hear loud music coming from another student's room down the hall. You don't know the student, but you decide to ask him/her to turn the music down. What would you say?

---

2) You are at the record store with your best friend. There's a CD you really want to buy, but you don't have any money. How do you ask your friend to lend you money?

---

3) 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 would you say?

.---

---

4) You have bought a shirt from a big store for your father, but he doesn't like its color. You decide to go to the clothes store and ask the manager of the store to allow you to exchange the shirt. What would you say?

---

5) Your friend and you go to a restaurant to eat. You want to order and need to ask the waiter for the menu. What would you say?

---

6) You are writing your thesis and need to interview the president of a university whom you don't know. You know the president is very busy, but still want to ask him/her to spare one or two hours for your interview. What would you say?

---

7) For registration you need to fill out a couple of forms. You search all of your pockets and cannot find a pen. You want to ask another student who is sitting next to you in the department hall. What would you say?

---

8) You were absent last Friday history class that you are enrolled in. So you decide to borrow your friend's notes to catch up with the rest of the class. What would you say to get this friend to lend you the notes?

---

9) You are a professor teaching a course in psychology. You want one of the students who is very competent and always contributes to class discussion, to present a paper in a class a week earlier than scheduled. However, midterm exams are next week and she has a heavy course load. What would you say?

---

10) You really have to take this course in order to graduate, but you found that the course is already closed. So, you decide to ask the professor, whom you don't know, to allow you to take this course. What would you say to get this professor to permit you to participate in this course?

---

11) You have a paper due in one of your classes next week. However, you will be very busy this week and don't have any time to write it. You go to your

professor's office to ask for more time to write the paper. How do you request an extension?

---

12) You are a librarian. Today a student is making a noise and disturbing other students. You don't know that student. However, you decide to ask the student to quiet down. What would you say?

---

13) A friend of yours from out of the town is paying you a visit. Both of you would like to take a photo together to remember this happy moment. You decide to ask a nearby person who is a stranger to you, to do this favor. What would you say?

---

14) You and your friend are members of the college skiing club. You have just arrived at the mountain and see that your friend is applying sunscreen lotion. You want to use that lotion because you have forgotten to bring your own. How would you ask your friend?

---

15) Your English midterm exam is approaching, and you find that the date of the test is the same as that of your brother's wedding. You decide to ask the professor whom you don't know personally to rearrange another day especially for you to take this test. What would you say?

---

16) Your mother will be visiting from out of town and you want to pick her up at the airport. However, her flight arrives at 3:00 p.m., but you have to work until 5:00 p.m. How do you ask your boss to let you out of work early?

---

17) You are a teacher. It's the beginning of the semester and you don't know the students yet. In class, the mobile phone of one of your students rings. You want to ask him/her to turn off the mobile phone. What would you say?

---

18) You are going to visit your friend, who lives in the college dormitory. You are on the campus, but you don't know where the room is. You are going to ask a student for the location of the dorm. How would you ask the student?

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---

19) It's 7:00 a.m. and you want to go to work. You have to leave your daughter alone because her babysitter is late. You decide to ask your friend, who lives in your neighborhood to take care of your little daughter in the meanwhile. What would you say?

---

20) You are the manager of a company. You are in the meeting with the other members of your company. You need to write some notes, but you realize that you don't have any paper. You turn to the person sitting next to you and you know him/her very well. What would you say?

---

21) Your class has just finished and you need a ride home. Your fellow classmate who was supposed to give you a ride is absent. As you come out of the class,

you see an assistant professor. You decide to ask him/her to give a lift to you. What would you say?

---

22) You are the president of a university. Something is wrong with your computer. You have to finish some work which is due tomorrow. One of the students is very skillful in fixing computers. You don't know him/her. However, you want to ask him/her to fix your computer. What would you say?

---

23) You are applying for a scholarship, and you decide to ask a professor, who knows you very well as your academic advisor, to write a recommendation letter for you. What would you say to ask him/her to do this favor for you?

---

24) You are the owner of a big bookstore. It is the beginning of the semester, and you are very busy. Today you want to extend business hours by an hour. So, you decide to ask your clerk whom you know quite well, to stay after store hours. What would you say?

THANK YOU…

Appendix C: Samples of the Coded Interlanguage and Baseline Data

Combination A

Situation 1

PI1: ----------

PI2: Dear friend, would you turn it down please? I should study for test.(CIQP)

PI3: Please turn the music down. (DMD)

PI4: Dear my friend can you turn the music down thank you.(CIQP)

PI5: Turn down the music please. (DMD)

PI6: Would you mind turning the music down?(CIQP)

PI7: Hey please turn your music player down.(DMD)

PI8: I wonder if you turn down your music.(CIQP)

PI9: You should turn down the music.(DOS)

PI10: Turn down the music.(DMD)

PI11: Would you mind turning the music down? (CIQP)

PI12: Can you turn your music down please?(CIQP)

PI13: Hi would you please turn the music down?(CIQP)

PI14: Would you mind turning the music down please? It's very loud.
Thanks.(CIQP)

PI15: If you can turn the music down please.(CIQP)

PI16: Could you turn down the music?(CIQP)

PI17: Would you mind turning down your stereo my dear?(CIQP)

PI18: Can you turn off your CD player?(CIQP)

PI19: Please turn down the music because I am reading a book.(DMD)

PI20: Would you please turn the music down?(CIQP)

Combination B

Situation 2

I1: Can you pay the money? I will pay you back.(CIQP)

I2: Dear friend, I forget to bring my money with myself can you lend me some money?(CIQP)

I3:----------

I4: Would it be ok if I borrow some money?(CIQP)

I5: Do you mind if I borrow money?(CIQP)

I6: Please lend me some money to buy a CD I promise to you to give it to you tomorrow.(DMD)

I7: I wonder if I could borrow some money from you. I'll give it back soon.(CIQP)

I8: May I ask you to lend me some money?(CIQP)

I9: Would you lend me money to buy this CD please? I'll give it back to you as soon as possible.(CIQP)

I10: Can you lend some money to me?(CIQP)

I11: Excuse me I want to buy a CD and I don't have enough money if you have money may you lend me?(CIQP)

I12: Can you lend me money?(CIQP)

I13: Could you lend me money?(CIQP)

I14: Can I borrow money from you? (CIQP)

I15: Could you lend me some money?(CIQP)

I16: Would you mind if I borrowed some money from you?(CIQP)

I17: Could you lend me some money?(CIQP)

I18: Would you mind if I borrowed your money?(CIQP)

I19: Do you have extra amount of money?(NCISH)

I20: Give me some money please.(DMD)

Combination C

Situation 5

UI1: Would you please bring the menu?(CIQP)

UI2: Menu please. (DMD)

UI3: Is it possible to give menu to me? (CIQP)

UI4: Can you bring us the menu?(CIQP)

UI5: May I have a menu? (CIQP)

UI6: Menu please. (DMD)

UI7: Menu please. (DMD)

UI8: Menu please. (DMD)

UI9: Hey waiter, menu please. (DMD)

UI10: Can you bring the menu please?(CIQP)

UI11: Excuse me, can you give me menu?(CIQP)

UI12: Excuse me sir can you give me your menu?(CIQP)

UI13: Can you give me the menu please? (CIQP)

UI14: Can I have menu please?(CIQP)

UI15: Excuse me can I have the menu please?(CIQP)

UI16: Come here please. I wanted the menu.(DWS)

UI17: Sorry, can you bring the menu?(CIQP)

UI18: May I see the menu?(CIQP)

UI19: Waiter, may I have the menu?(CIQP)

UI20: Please give us the menu. (DMD)

UI21: Bring the menu please. (DMD)

UI22: Would you bring the menu please? (CIQP)

UI23: Can I see the menu?(CIQP)

UI24: Would you please give the menu?(CIQP)

UI25: Would you mind giving me your menu?(CIQP)

UI26: Excuse me, can I have your menu to order the meal.(CIQP)

UI27: Sorry sir/madam I need the menu. (NCISH)

UI28: Excuse me waiter would you please give me the menu?(CIQP)

UI29: Could you give me the menu? (CIQP)

UI30: Sorry give me a menu please. (DMD)

UI31: Menu please.(DMD)

UI32: Excuse me may I have the menu?(CIQP)

UI33: Excuse me could you bring the menu?(CIQP)

UI34: Would you mind bringing menu?(CIQP)

UI35: Menu please.(DMD)

Combination D

Situation 3

A1: Can you, please, close that window? (CIQP)

A2: My brother close the window because the weather is cold thank you. (DMD)

A3: Please close the window sooner. (DMD)

A4: Close window. (DMD)

A5: Close the door. (DMD)

A6: Shut the door please.(DMD)

A7: Hey you, don't you understand it's cold.(NCISH)

A8: Close the window!(DMD)

A9: Close it right now.(DMD)

A10: Close the window. (DMD)

A11: Please close the window.(DMD)

A12: Would you mind closing the window? (CIQP)

A13: Close the window please. (DMD)

A14: Close the window.(DMD)

A15: Close it. (DMD)

A16:----------

A17: Close the window. (DMD)

A18: Close the window. (DMD)

A19: Could you close the window? (CIQP)

A20: Close the window!(DMD)

A21: Shall you close the window and leave me alone?(DOS)

A22: Please close the window.(DMD)

A23: Please close the window honey?(DMD)

A24: Close the window.(DMD)

A25: Could you close the window?(CIQP)

A26: Close the window please. (DMD)

A27: Close that window. (DMD)

A28: Close the window. (DMD)

A29: Close the window. (DMD)

A30: Close the window?(DMD)

A31: Close the window. (DMD)

A32: Close the window (DMD)

A33: Close the window. (DMD)

A34: Close the door. (DMD)

A35: Close it. (DMD)

A36: Close the window. (DMD)

A37: Close it. (DMD)

A38: Close the window. (DMD)

A39: Close the window. (DMD)

A40: Close the window. (DMD)

Combination E

Situation 6

NS1: I wondered if there was any way you'd have time for me to interview you for my thesis?(CIQP)

NS2: Could you spare me some of your valuable time for my thesis?(CIQP)

NS3: I know you are extremely busy, sir/ madam, but I would really appreciate it if you could grant me an hour or possibly two of your time so that I can interview you in depth for my thesis.(CIQP)

NS4: I'm really sorry to trouble you, but I was wondering if I could possibly interview you as a part of my thesis? It would really be a great help to me if you could spare me an hour or two, because this is at the very heart of what I am researching.(CIQP)

NS5: Excuse me, I know you're extremely busy, but I would be very grateful if you could give me an appointment to interview you as part of my thesis. It wouldn't take much more than an hour. (CIQP)

NS6: I wonder if you could possibly spare a couple of hours to speak to me.(CIQP)

NS7: Could you please spare me an hour?(CIQP)

NS8: I would be very grateful if you could spare the time for an interview with me regarding my thesis.(CIQP)

NS9: Would you be able to spare some time for an interview?(CIQP)

NS10: ----------

Combination F

Situation 4

NS1: Could I change if for one in a different colour?(CIQP)

NS2: Could I change this shirt to another colour please?(CIQP)

NS3: I bought this shirt for my father last week, but he doesn't like the colour. I'd like to exchange it for a blue one please. I have the receipt here. (DHP)

NS4: Would it be possible for me to change this shirt? I bought it for my father but it turns out he doesn't like the colour (CIQP)

NS5: Would it be possible to change it for another one?(CIQP)

NS6: Is it possible for me to exchange it for a different colour? (CIQP)

NS7: May I change it please?(CIQP)

NS8: May I exchange this shirt for a different color?(CIQP)

NS9: Could I exchange it for something else?(CIQP)

NS10: Is it possible to change the shirt?(CIQP)