

**THE EFFECT OF POLITENESS STRATEGIES INSTRUCTION ON THE  
PERFORMANCE OF REQUEST AMONG IRANIAN MALE AND  
FEMALE EFL LEARNERS**

**Farideh Tina**

MA Candidate in TEFL,  
Department of English Language and Literature,  
Ahar Branch, Islamic Azad University,  
Ahar, Iran

**Nader Assadi**

PhD in Applied Linguistics,  
Department of English Language and Literature,  
Ahar Branch, Islamic Azad University,  
Ahar, Iran

**Masoud Zoghi**

PhD in TEFL,  
Department of English Language and Literature,  
Ahar Branch, Islamic Azad University,  
Ahar, Iran

**Abstract**

The main function of language is communication, and pragmatic competence is an important component of communicative competence. Each speech community uses conventionally polite expressions. As differing politeness strategies are used by different speech communities, misunderstanding may arise. Since the request is the mostly used speech act in academic settings and Iranian EFL learners face many problems in using appropriate politeness strategies in their requests within different situations regarding the addressee' power, social distance and relationship, the current study aims to investigate the effect of teaching politeness instructions on the performance of requests. In doing so, the researcher

conducted an experimental study comprised pre-test, treatment and post-test. 80 undergraduate students majoring in Translating English language was chosen to participate in this study. They were divided into two experimental and control groups. The OPT test was taken from both groups to be assured that they were homogenized. The subjects in the experimental group received treatment on politeness strategies for 10 weeks based on Poynton's three-dimensional model; that is; power, affect and distance, while the control group had not received any such instructions. At the end of ten weeks, the post –test was taken from all the subjects as discourse completion task and the data from both groups were analyzed by SPSS. The findings showed that instructions on politeness strategies has effect on subjects's pragmatic competence in making requests but there is no statistically significant difference between male and female subjects after receiving instructions.

**Keywords:** Politeness, Request, Gender, Pragmatic, Pragmatic Competence

## Introduction

English, as a communication tool, is playing an extremely significant role in cross-cultural communication. The main function of language is communication, and pragmatic competence is an important component of communicative competence. Each speech community uses conventionally polite expressions to further human relationships, create a friendly atmosphere and help establish social order. As differing politeness strategies are used by different speech communities, misunderstanding may arise. Transferring a conventional polite expression from a learner's native language to the target language, may sometimes result in obscuring the intended meaning.

The need to make a request occurs very frequently in daily life and it is important for language learners know the appropriate request behavior in context. Richards (1983) notes that violating norms of the target language may cause more than syntactic or phonological errors because these violations interfere with the speaker's "presentation of self".

Politeness has been greatly emphasized in Iranian Culture since the ancient times. Politeness is contextually gendered in the Iranian society due to its unique social and cultural norms. In this community a range of linguistic behaviors has been developed. Persian speakers show their sensitivity to the social distance and relative status of addressees through the intricate system of their language. Regarding social context, utterances cannot be neutral and linguistic choices imply these vertical relationships. One of the factors that determines the relative status of individuals in the Iranian Society is gender. In this social structure, there are asymmetries between men and women with respect to power, status, autonomy and role visibility. Iranian women should be more polite than men to maintain their composure and dignity (Shafiee Nahrkhalaji et.al, 2013).

The changing situation regarding the status of Iranian Women in recent decades, however, has made the relationship between gender and linguistic patterns representing politeness in present-day Iran so complex. The social status of females has developed as a result

of their academic education and important social responsibility; therefore; the language of females has got closer to the language used by males. (Shafiee Naharkhalaji et.al, 2013).

Following this line of inquiry, the present study aims at investigating the potential effect of politeness strategies instruction on Iranian EFL learners' production of a certain number of requests in English, in other word it examines whether Iranian EFL learners' pragmatic competence can be enhanced by instruction on politeness in the speech act of request. As such, the following research questions are put forward:

- 1- Does politeness strategies instruction have a significant impact on Iranian Male EFL Learners' production of requests?
- 2- Does politeness strategies instruction have a significant impact on Iranian Female EFL Learners' production of requests?
- 3- Is there any difference in production of requests among male and female Iranian EFL Learners treated with politeness strategies?

Based on these research questions, the research hypothesis are announced as follow:

- 1- There is no significant impact of politeness strategies instruction in Iranian male EFL Learners' production of requests.
- 2- There is no significant impact of politeness strategies instruction in Iranian male EFL Learners' production of requests.
- 3- There is no difference between male and female Iranian EFL learners' production of request instructed by politeness strategies.

### **Request & Politeness**

A request is an illocutionary act whereby a speaker (requester) conveys to a hearer (requestee) that he/she wants the requestee to perform an act, which is for the benefit of the speaker" (Trosborg, 1994). Blum-Kulka (1991) defines requests as "pre-event acts, intended to affect the hearer's behaviors"; Under this perspective, "an effective request is one for which the hearer recognizes the speaker's intent," and understands what he or she is supposed to do.

Politeness is the awareness of another person's "face" or the means employed to acknowledge the public self-image of a person. It is a system of interpersonal relations designed to facilitate interaction by minimizing the potential for conflict and confrontation inherent in all human interactions and transactions (Lakoff, 1990).

### **Halliday's Function**

Halliday (1985) says that language is a social institution governed by certain principles. Thus in any interpretation of fictional or dramatic discourse, the speech situation and speech even do play a vital role.

Halliday (1994) postulate that language is multi-strate system. It starts out in the extra-linguistic realm of the social context of situation (register, with its variables of field, tenor and mode) and goes through the intra-linguistic strata of 1) meanings (semantics with its metafunctional components: ideational, interpersonal, and textual); 2) forms/wordings (lexicogrammar with its metafunctional-related systems: transitivity, mood and modality and theme); 3) expression (phonology with its units: tone-group, foot, syllable, and phoneme; and graphology with its units: paragraph, orthographic sentence, sub-sentence, phrase, orthographic word and letter).

1- Field, the social action: what is happening, the nature of the social action that is taking place, what it is that the participants are engaged in, in which the language figures as some essential component.

2- Tenor, the role structure: who is taking part, the nature of the participants, their statuses and roles, what kinds of role relationship obtain among the participants, including permanent and temporary relationships of one kind or another, both the types of speech role that they are taking on in the dialogue and the whole cluster of socially significant relationships in which they are involved.

3- Mode, the symbolic organization: what part language is playing, what it is that the participants are expecting the language to do for them in the situation. The symbolic organization of the text, the status that it has, and its function in the context, including the channel (is it spoken or written or some combination of the two?) and also the rhetorical mode, what is being achieved by the text in terms of such categories as persuasive, expository, didactic and the like. (Halliday, 1985) Halliday (1978) considers language as having three main functions:

- The ideational function is to organize the speakers' or writers' experience of the real or imaginary world, i.e. language refers to real or imaged persons, things, actions, events, states, etc.
- The interpersonal function is to indicate, establish, or maintain social relationships between people. It includes forms of address, speech function, modality, etc.
- The textual function is to create written or spoken texts which cohere within themselves and which fit the particular situations in which they are used.

One of the attractions of this particular model of context for Halliday's theory is that it fits nicely with his model of the organization of language itself. (Eggins and Martin, 1997)

Table 1. *The Functional Organization of Language in Relation to Categories for Analyzing Context (Eggins and Martin, 1997)*

Metafunction (Organization of language)	Register (Organization of Context)
Interpersonal meaning (resources for interacting)	Tenor (role structure)
Ideational meaning (resources for building content)	Field (social action)
Textual meaning (resources for organizing texts)	Mode (symbolic organization)

According to Halliday (1978), each of the three meta-functions tends to serve to project one of the three different aspects of context; he sets out the following correspondence as a working hypothesis:

- Field – Ideational
- Tenor – Interpersonal
- Mode – Textual

That is to say, the field tends to determine ideational meanings, the tenor interpersonal ones, and the mode textual ones. For instance, the significant social action is reflected in the ideational resources of transitivity, whereas the tenor of the relations between speaker and listener is reflected in selections of mood and modality.(Halliday, 1978)

Table 2. *Relationship between Context, Strata and Systems (Extracted From Eggins and Martin)*

Context Register variable	Type of meaning	Language Discourse- patterns	semantic patterns	Lexico-grammatical patterns
Field	Ideational	Lexical cohesion		Transitivity (case)
Tenor	Interpersonal	Conjunctive relations		Lexico-semantic relations
Mode	Textual	Speech function		Mood, modality, vocation, attitude
		Exchange structure		
		Reference (participant tracking)		Theme, information structure, nominalization

**Poynton’s Model**

The simplest representation of tenor in the form of a systemic network is as follows:

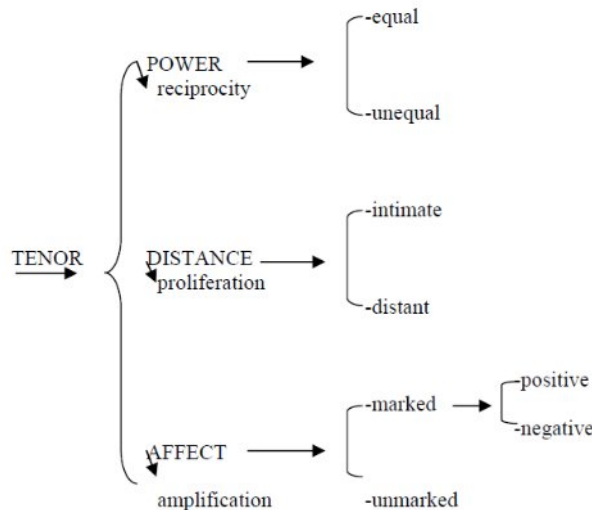


Fig. 1. *Tenor (Poynton, 1985)*

*Power*

The first dimension is called POWER. The end-points, or poles, of the POWER dimension are defined in terms of equality and inequality, relations that are constituted respectively in terms of the reciprocity or non-reciprocity of the relevant semiotic forms used by interactants. This distinction is modelled as a choice between the features [equal] and [unequal]. These are to be read as ideal or abstract forms of relations, rarely met in this ideal form in human social life. (Poynton, 1985). According to Poynton The fact of inequality, and the forms/mechanisms of such inequality at the micro level in human social interaction need, however, to be distinguished from the social bases of inequality at a more macro level, involving such key sites of difference as gender, class, race/ethnicity and generation.

*Distance*

The second tenor dimension is DISTANCE. The end-points, or poles, of the DISTANCE dimension are defined in terms of intimacy and distance, relations that are constituted in terms of the range (proliferation) of choices made (or available) from the relevant semiotic systems used

by interactants. This distinction is modelled as a choice between the features. Just as the naming of the dimension of POWER implicitly reflects the tendency of human relations to be structured in terms of power, a relation of inequality, so the naming of this second dimension implicitly reflects the tendency of human relations to be structured in terms of distance rather than intimacy. [intimate] and [distant].

#### *Affect*

The third tenor dimension is AFFECT. This system is different from the other two in that the first choice apparently allows one the option of 'opting out', with its initial choice between [marked] and [unmarked]. The choice is rather one of whether or not to display affect: the absence of overt realisation is a choice and is meaningful. This is the first of a number of features differentiating this tenor system from the other two. The differences arise principally from the fact that this dimension relates to the personal component of the interpersonal, whereas the other dimensions relate to the social. POWER and DISTANCE are relational: the interaction between the choices made by interactants ensures that relations along these two dimensions in a particular situation can always be located somewhere on the cline between [equal] and [unequal] with respect to POWER, and somewhere on the cline between [intimate] and [distant] with respect to DISTANCE. AFFECT will always be present, as the 'emotional charge' (interpretable variously as want or desire, ideological commitment, belief, the conviction that something matters or is of importance) which the individual speaker both brings to discourse, seen as both experiential and interpersonal, and produces as a reaction to discourse.

Academic setting requires a great knowledge of pragmatics, specifically request speech acts. "Asking questions and engaging in questioning sequences in talk, represent a pervasive part of academic and work life that is critical for getting information, contributing ideas, and being actively involved in the environment".

The framework for classroom analysis on text was to be based on the tenor or interpersonal variable in Systemic Functional Linguistics. A very useful framework for analysis in terms of tenor is Poynton's (1985) typology of social dimensions, which draws on the tenor variable as described by Martin (1992). Therefore, the Poynton's three-dimensional model which is based on Tenor was selected as the basis of instruction in this study.

## **Methodology**

### *Subjects*

The Subjects included 80 undergraduate subjects majoring in Translating English Language at University College of Nabi Akram, Tabriz, Iran. According to the demographic questionnaire (Appendix A) 75 out of 80 subjects participated in this study had never visited any English speaking countries or had never visited any country where English is used as a second language. 70 subjects studied English in a private institute apart from learning English in schools and universities and none of them had ever formally studied any course related to appropriate requesting techniques and exploiting appropriate politeness strategies. All the subjects were 50 females and 30 males. Since it was impossible to select the subjects randomly to two groups, the study was done on two intact groups. All the subjects' age ranged from 19-31 years old. The mean age of subjects in the experimental group was 22.30 and there were 15 males (37.5%) and 25 females (62.5%); for the control group, the mean age was 21.8 years and there was 19 males (60%) and 21 females (40%).

### *Instruments*

Since the random selection of subjects to groups was not possible, we had to work with two intact groups, though the Oxford Placement Test was administered to ensure the comparability of the groups in terms of language equivalence. This standardized test was used to determine the English Proficiency of subjects. It was taken from Oxford university press and university of Cambridge local examinations (2001).

Having the subjects complete all the tasks and participate in classroom activities is meaningless unless we measure the effectiveness of those methods at the end. For this purpose, post-test was designed. The DCT was prepared based on six situations and considering the variables of the study (Appendix B), the data collected by DCT aimed to represent and exemplify requests in the controlled situations. For each situation, contextual variables such as relative social status, level of acquaintance, level of social distance were clarified. The six scenarios represented different gender interactions in one situational context that is on the sidewalk to control the effect of situational context. The questions (1, 2, 3) included scenarios of encountering three different social statuses; that is, higher (professor), equal (colleague), and lower (pupil). The next three questions (4, 5, 6) included scenarios of encountering three different degrees of solidarity that is high (close friends), fair (classmates), and low (acquaintances). Regarding the social distance between the interlocutors, subjects were supposed to interact with people who were familiar with.

Prior to the actual data collection, the scenarios in Blum-Kulka (1982) were adapted to suit the Iranian context. The modified form of DCT is given to two lecturers in TEFL for validation. Their suggestions well taken into consideration in designing the final form of the DCT. For further validation, the DCT was piloted on five subjects, similar to the main group, not included in the sample to see the language was comprehensible for EFL Learners and based on their opinions, a few changes were made.

Reliability is the quality of test scores which refer to consistency of measures across different times, test forms, raters and other characteristics of the measurement context (Bachman, 1990). One approach to examine the internal consistency of the test is the split-half method, in which we divide the test into two halves and then determine the extent to which scores on these two halves are consistent with each other. The coefficient alpha called Cronbach's alpha, is a good test of internal consistency (Cronbach, 1984). The reliability of the rubric in DCT was calculated using reliability analysis in the SPSS statistical package at 0.810 (Guffman split Half Coefficient).

### **Procedure**

Having assigned the two groups to the experimental and the control group, the instructor (not the researcher) taught the politeness strategies based on Poynton's three-dimensional model through teaching the Letter Writing Book, while the control group had received no such instructions. The treatment was done in ten weeks, one 90-minute session weekly.

According to Kostoulas (2012), there were three steps involved in each session; that is, presentation, practice and production (PPP). PPP is a method for teaching structures in a foreign language. As its name suggests, PPP is divided into three phases, moving from teacher control towards learner freedom (Kostoulas, 2012).

A presentation phase is controlled by the teacher; the subjects were introduced to the new structure in a new given situation. From this, the instructor presented the required politeness strategy in the given situation. It was such that the instructor read the request in a given situation

by putting the emphasize on the appropriate politeness strategy and it was followed by an explicit instruction of the rules involved.

During the practice phase, the learners practice the language structure correctly. In this phase, the instructor's role is to direct the activities, to provide positive feedback to students, correct mistakes and model the correct forms. Then, the subjects were presented with awareness-raising questions to make sure that they had learned how to make requests. Whenever they were making mistakes, at first the teacher asked the subjects about the correctness of the presented request, when it was not corrected, an explicit feedback was made and they received correction.

When the learners have completely mastered the form and have learnt how to produce appropriate request without mistakes in controlled situations, they can move on to the production phase. In this phase, they use the newly learnt instruction to produce correct and appropriate requests. In this phase, the teacher does not generally intervene or correct. While the production phase, the learners did role play with their peers at first and then in groups of 4 persons to practice what they learnt.

During treatment, at the early stages, more informal situations were provided, while as sessions passed, more formal situations were posed and discussed, The instructions include mostly classroom activities like classroom drills and role plays. Firstly, the situations which was supposed to teach, were written on the board, the subjects' attention was taken to the distance, power and affect among the interlocutors, the appropriate request was read by the teacher, the teacher asked the subjects to practice similar requests in the given situation. Whenever the subjects made a mistake in providing appropriate request which conform the given situations, the teacher at first asked the other subjects to correct it, when the mistake could not be amended, the teacher gave the correct request and explained about the kind of mistake in the given situation.

### **Data Analysis**

The subjects' performance on DCT was rated on a 5- point rating scale ranging from 1, very unsatisfactory, to 5, completely appropriate, for both groups, it was such that the instructor rated subjects' performance based on a 5 point rating scale ranging from 1 to 5 based on the rating system developed by Hudson, Detmer and Brown (1995) as provided in appendix C.

Since there were six situations in the DCT posttest and regarding that each situation's score would be 5 in maximum, so the total score on the DCT was computed by 30.

Following the scoring of the DCT for both the control and experimental group, statistical analysis was conducted in order to facilitate accurate interpretation of the data. The experimental study usually yields sets of scores that are independent of each other because the students are different in each group (Brown, 1988). Where the means belong to two different groups, the t-test is called the independent t - test. In other words, the groups are independent of one another (Farhady, 1995). In order to address Research Question 1 and 2, to study the effect of politeness strategies on the request performance of Iranian EFL learners by gender, the T-Statistical Test for Independent samples was used separately for each of the research questions to find any difference between the control group and the experimental group. Since there is no logical reason to expect one of the means in each of the experimental and the control group to be higher than the other (Brown, 1988), the analysis was done at a two-tailed significance level of P=less than 0.5. If one finds a situation in which both sets of score come from the same group of subjects (the scores are not independent), one should look for some mention that a T test for correlated or



paired means was used. This version of the T test involves the application of a formula that compensates for the fact that the scores in each of the two sets are related (Brown, 1988). Following this and regarding the Research Question 3, the Paired-Sample Test was used for analyzing the data to find out any difference among males and females in DCT post-test after receiving treatment for ten weeks.

**Results & Discussion**

Prior to giving any instruction to the groups, the OPT test was taken from all the subjects and its scores were analyzed by SPSS as Independent t-test. A 0.05 level of significance was used in all of the statistical analyses. As it can be seen in Table 3, the  $P= 0.485 > 0.05$ , so it can be concluded that there is no statistically significant difference in the performance of OPT test prior to the treatment.

Table 3. *Independent T-test for OPT Scores*

		<b>Independent Samples Test</b>						
		t-test for Equality of Means						
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
							Lower	Upper
OPT	Equal variances assumed	-.701	78	.485	-1.75000	2.49470	-6.71657	3.21657
	Equal variances not assumed	-.701	72.472	.485	-1.75000	2.49470	-6.72254	3.22254

Having scored the DCT posttest of both the experimental group and the control group after ten-week treatment on teaching the politeness strategies based on Ponton’s three-dimensional model (1985), at first the analysis was done on the whole effectiveness of such instructions that is the all subjects’ performance in the DCT posttest were analyzed as the Independent T-test by SPSS regardless of the gender as the moderator variable.

Regarding the descriptive statistics, it can be seen that (Table 4), the mean of DCT scores in the control group is 17.85 (SD=4.09) while the mean of DCT scores in the experimental group is 23.05 (SD=3.27).

Table 4. *Descriptive Statistics of DCT Scores by Groups*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Control Group	40	10.00	27.00	17.8500	4.09221
Experimental Group	40	18.00	29.00	23.0500	3.27344
Valid N (listwise)	40				

In order to study the effectiveness of instruction for ten weeks, Independent t-test analysis was done by SPSS statistical software. As it can be seen in Table 5, politeness instructions have an effect on the performance of requests among Iranian EFL learners ( $P < 0.05$ )

Table 5. *Independent T-test of DCT Scores by Groups*

		<b>Independent Samples Test</b>						
		t	df	t-test for Equality of Means				
				Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
							Lower	Upper
DCT score s	Equal variances assumed	-6.276	78	.000	-5.20000	.82858	6.84957	-3.55043
	Equal variances not assumed	-6.276	74.411	.000	-5.20000	.82858	6.85082	-3.54918

*Results for Research Question 1*

In order to answer this research question, the DCT scores of males in the control and experimental groups are compared and they are analyzed by Independent t-test via SPSS. In so doing, at first, the descriptive statistics of the results are provided. The mean scores of DCT of male subjects in the control group was 17.76 (SD=4.18) while the mean score of the male subjects in the experimental group was 23.86 (SD=3.39).

Having done the descriptive statistics of the DCT posttest score among the male participants in the study, the analysis was done to statistically approve the effectiveness of getting instructions of politeness strategies on male EFL learners' production of request. In so doing, since the responses are from different two groups of the experimental and the control group, the independent T-test was used by SPSS to compare the means of male subjects in these two groups like all the other analysis in this study, 0.05 level of significance was used in this part. According to table 6, the P is less than 0.05 which shows the effectiveness of instruction of politeness strategies on the request performance among male EFL learners.

Table 6. *Independent T-test of DCT Scores of Male EFL Learners by Groups*

		<b>Independent Samples Test</b>						
		t	df	t-test for Equality of Means				
				Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
							Lower	Upper
DC T Scor e	Equal variances assumed	-4.327	32	.000	-5.76140	1.33146	-8.47350	3.04931
	Equal variances not assumed	-4.435	31.954	.000	-5.76140	1.29910	-8.40774	3.11507

*Results for Research Question 2*

In order to answer this research question, the DCT scores of females in the control and experimental groups are compared and they are analyzed by Independent t-test via SPSS. In so

doing, at first, the descriptive statistics of the results are provided. The mean scores of DCT of female subjects in the control group was 17.61 (SD=4.10) while the mean score of the female subjects in the experimental group was 22.56 (3.16).

Since the responses are from different two groups of the experimental and the control group, the independent T-test was used by SPSS to compare the means of female subjects in these two groups like all the other analysis in this study, 0.05 level of significance was used in this part. According to table 7, the P is less than 0.05 which shows the effectiveness of instruction of politeness strategies on the request performance among female EFL learners.

Table 7. Independent T-test of DCT Scores of Male EFL Learners by Groups

		Independent Samples Test						
		t	df	t-test for Equality of Means			95% Confidence	
				Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
DCT Score	Equal variances assumed	-4.609	44	.000	-4.94095	1.07202	-7.10147	-2.78044
	Equal variances not assumed	-4.506	37.215	.000	-4.94095	1.09660	-7.16244	-2.71946

### Results for Research Question 3

Although analysis was done generally and then separately on both the male and female subjects after ten-week treatment and the results indicated the significant improvement on male and female subjects' performance on the DCT posttest in the experimental group compared to the control group, it was a question to see whether males or females do better in the DCT posttest after ten weeks of instruction in other words to do the analysis on the male and female's performance on the DCT to see whether the instruction has better effect and improvement on the request of males or females and to see which of them did best after getting instructions. In so doing, the research Question 3 is posed; that is, is there any difference in the production of requests among male and female Iranian EFL learners treated with politeness strategies?

For this end, the analysis was done in comparison of the mean of DCT scores of female and male subjects in the experimental group. The female subjects in the control group produced the mean score of 17.61 (SD=4.10) while the male subjects in this group, produced the mean scores of 18.10 (SD=4.17) in the DCT posttest. In the experimental group, females subjects produced the mean scores of 22.56 (SD=3.16) in the DCT posttest and the male subjects in the experimental group produced the mean score of 23.86 (SD=3.39).

According to Brown (1988), if you find a situation in which both sets of scores come from the same group of subjects (the scores are not independent), you should look for some mention that a t test for correlated or paired means was used. In so doing, the analysis was continued as Paired Sample t test

With SPSS. Since 0.05 level of significance was used in all of the statistical analysis and this section is no exception, and having considered that according to table 8, P is more than 0.562, so there is no statistically significance difference and we can conclude that there was no statistically

significant difference between the performance of males and females in the DCT in the experimental group who received the instruction.

Table 8. Paired Sample Test for DCT Scores of Male and Female EFL Learners by Groups

		Paired Samples Test					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Paired Differences			Lower			
			Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
Control	Female-Male	-.78947	5.82694	1.33679	-3.59797	2.01902	-.591	18	.562
Experimental	Female-Male	-1.66667	4.83539	1.24849	-4.34441	1.01108	1.335	14	.203

There is encouraging evidence for the teachability of pragmatics. Overall, the studies that address pedagogical interventions for teaching pragmatics can be categorized into two general teaching approaches: explicit vs. implicit teaching. Motivated by Schmidt’s (1993) notions of the role of consciousness and noticing-of-the-gap, implicit teaching involves consciousness-raising activities, i.e., presenting prototypical uses of the item in meaningful contexts with or without input enhancement (to help learners notice relevant input) (Bardovi-Harlig, 1996). The underlying assumption is that if learners are “encouraged to think for themselves about culturally appropriate ways” to perform speech acts, then these learners will become aware of “their own lay abilities for pragmatic analysis” (Bardovi-Harlig et al., 1996). Therefore, in the implicit teaching of pragmatics, the success of instruction may depend on how well it raises the learners’ awareness of the rules for appropriate L2 use (Clennell, 1999). Explicit teaching, on the other hand, generally involves providing explicit metapragmatic information about L2 rules through explanations (Bouton, 1994; House, 1996), metacognitive discussions (Olshtain & Cohen, 1990), and corrective feedback (Bouton, 1994).

According to Alcon (2001), the foreign language classroom has been regarded as a suitable environment for the acquisition of pragmatic competence; it is believed that employing similar methodologies in Persian EFL environments would be of benefit to foster the learners’ ability to make requests. It comes as no surprise that the positive effects of the instruction are consistent with earlier findings (Salemi et.al, 2012). The instruction in previous studies consisted of a wide range of activities that provided learners with metapragmatic information and/or raised their awareness of metapragmatic rules. Following these approaches, the instructor in the present study dedicated ten weeks, one 90-minute weekly to teach the appropriate usage of the target forms by explaining the relationships among the linguistic forms, function (i.e., request), situations, and a factor of power (i.e., academic status).

Explicit instruction on FL grammatical or pragmatic elements raises the learner’s consciousness of element and facilitates their acquisition (Schmit, 1993). According to the results presented in Chapter Four, it can be seen that the mean scores of students’ DCT posttest showed statistically significant improvement in the experimental group. This suggests that explicit instruction on politeness strategies does have a positive effect on language learners’ performance on requests.

As Schmidt and Frota (1986) pointed out, noticed information that was later used or applied by language learners in different contexts strengthens communicative interaction and leads to language acquisition. This was also found to be true in the present study. Learners who received explicit instruction on pragmatics were able to notice certain features of the target-language pragmatics, such as how to “request” in certain communicative contexts, and employ it in the DCT posttest.

The findings of this study seem to support Schmidt’s noticing hypothesis (1993), especially as related to learners’ ability to produce significantly more appropriate forms or “provide enough information to accomplish the task” once they have become aware of these concepts and forms through explicit instruction on pragmatics.

### Conclusion

The findings from this study verify the effectiveness of having instruction on politeness strategies on their pragmatic competence in the speech act of requests. The results of this study conform with Schmit’s hypothesis (1993) on the effectiveness of pragmatic elements of the pragmatic competence of learners. Meanwhile, this study corresponded with the results of Salemi et.al (2012) about the effect of instruction on the speech act of suggestion and showed that explicit method of instruction has a better influence of Persian EFL Learners.

Although Brown (1994) observed that women show more positive politeness to friends than men do and more negative politeness in public, the results of this study are contrary to that study (Brown 1994) since both the male and female EFL learners showed significant improvement in their pragmatic competence and although very minor difference was seen between their mean scores, that was not statistically significant. On the other hand, the results in the current study conform with Melati (2009) study which indicated that men and women tend to employ similar strategies in performing politeness and face saving strategy.

A language educator’s responsibility is to remind learners that grammatical knowledge alone does not ensure language proficiency, but that proficiency comes from knowing and implementing linguistic rules and socio-cultural features found in the target culture. Language educators have to provide explicit instruction on politeness so that learners can have the opportunity to “notice” certain politeness features as they build on their existing pragmatic knowledge and move toward FL fluency.

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### **Appendix A: Demographic Questionnaire**

Dear Respondent,

This study is data-based; therefore, your help is required. You are kindly requested to complete this questionnaire. This will help analyze the written requests of Iranian EFL Learners and yield fruitful findings.

Your responses will be used for academic purposes only.

I would appreciate if you could complete this questionnaire as soon as possible. Thank you for your assistance and cooperation.

Please provide the following information about yourself.

- 1- Age:
- 2- Sex: Male  Female
- 3- University Level: Freshman  Sophomore  Junior  Senior
- 4- Have you ever visited any English speaking country? Yes  No
- 5- Have you ever visited any country where English is used as a second language? Yes  No
- 6- Have you ever studied in a private English language institute? Yes  No
- 7- Have you ever formally studied letter writing? Yes  No

### **Appendix B: Discourse Completion Task (post-test)**

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

2- 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 her/him to spare one or two hours for your interview. What would you say?

3- 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?

4- You are a professor teaching a course in psychology. You want one of the students who is very competent and always contributes 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?

5- 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 her/him to do this favor for you?

6- 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?

### **Appendix C: Rating Procedure**

Hudson, Detmer, and Brown (1992) developed a framework for assessing cross-cultural pragmatics as a first phase of their project. Adapting Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory, they selected three variables to be included in the tests: the power of the speaker with regard to the hearer, the distance between the speaker and the hearer, and the obligation of the speaker to accomplish the acts. Hudson et al. also developed a 1-5 rating scale, ranging from the very

unsatisfactory to completely appropriate, for native speakers who rated each examinee's response with the following criteria: ability to use the correct speech act, amount of speech in a given situation, formality level, directness level, and politeness level.

The students' scores are calculated as follows:

1 point for choosing correct speech act + 1 point for giving the required amount of information + 1 point for formality + 1 point for directness and + 1 point for politeness

Although the speech act of requesting is the focus in this study, several participants could not understand the exact notion of it, so 1 point is considered for the correct choosing of the speech act of requesting.

In any speech act, the enough amount of information shall be provided, so who gave enough amount of information got 1 point in this part.

Formality can be expressed through the word choice, phrasing, use of titles, and choice of verb forms (Hudson, Detmer & Brown, 1992) which resulted in adding 1 point to the score of participants in any situation

Politeness are measured by politeness expressions introducing the head acts of the request and the supportive moves used which has 1 point in the scoring.

Directness can be measured by the number of negative words used.

According to above clarification of the scoring process, the participants' performance on DCT was rated on a 5- point rating scale ranging from 1, very unsatisfactory, to 5, completely appropriate, for both groups, it was such that the instructor rated participants' performance based on a 5 point rating scale ranging from 1 to 5 based on the rating system developed by Hudson, Detmer and Brown (1995).