

Politeness Strategies Used in Text Messaging: Pragmatic Competence in an Asymmetrical Power Relation of Teacher–Student

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Abstract

One aspect of short message service (SMS) communication through a cell phone is use of politeness strategies. As it is extensively argued that females are more polite language users, the present study sought to describe the strategies used by these two groups and to find out whether there is any significant difference between male and female English as a foreign language (EFL) learners in the use of positive and negative politeness strategies in sending SMS to their professors, considering that there is an asymmetric power relation and social distance between them. To this end, a corpus of 300 L1 (Persian) and L2 (English) request messages was compiled. Results of qualitative and quantitative data analysis showed no significant difference between the two groups. Results of the study have implication in politeness research.

Keywords

text messages (SMS), politeness strategies, gender, EFL learners, pragmatic competence

Introduction

Communication through the media, particularly a cell phone, has developed its social, technical, and communicative functions in people's everyday lives (Ling & Pedersen, 2006). Hence, nearly many aspects of people's lives (e.g., daily conversations, shopping, giving information, job) have been influenced by the communication possibilities made available by cell phone. Although cell phone was developed for oral purpose, it is also widely used for other applications such as text messaging. Short message service (SMS) as one technological innovation and development can potentially influence language use (Baron, Squires, Tench, & Thompson, 2005). SMS communication through a cell phone is a new development in the study of language as a genre of language and medium of communication. As Emigh and Herring (2005) suggest, communication in every genre has certain structural properties. SMS communication is not an exception and enjoys certain characteristics.

SMS as a written form of communication by itself enjoys its own conventions and standards of written language. However, the language used in text messages seems to be more similar to speech. Spoken language of text messages is evidenced via colloquial expressions, types of reductions (syntactical reductions, short forms of words, and abbreviations), and unconventional ways of writing (using small letters). However, Segerstad (2005) pointed out that the language used in SMS is a hybridization of spoken and

written language. A corpus linguistic study of texting short messages in English by Tagg (2009) reported linguistic features, which distinguish text messages as a language variety different from written and spoken language.

In daily communication, obviously satisfying our needs is one of the main basic functions of language use. To achieve this goal, users apply different strategies to be polite, especially in requesting speech act, which is an imposition to the hearer. Polite language, especially in achieving requests asking others to do something for us, and various politeness strategies can be used. To that end, there are various norms and conventions in different cultures and communities (culture dependent). As politeness strategies are one of the areas in pragmatics, Akutsu (2006) claims “communicative competence comprises pragmatic competence and it's difficult for a learner of a language to participate in the target language community successfully without the competence” (p. 135). Studies on interlanguage pragmatics and acquisition of pragmatic competence have shown that pragmatic knowledge and skills can be taught to some extent. Many English as a foreign language (EFL)

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learners are not aware of pragmatics itself. In other words, they do not know how words and phrases are used with especial meanings in different situations. Distinguishing politeness strategies as well as having optimal knowledge about pragmatics, learners are able to apply suitable strategies to the situations. Therefore, we decided to notify the learners of such vital communicative issues in academic contexts.

A number of studies (Faiz & Suhaila, 2013; Holmes & Meyerhoff, 2003; Ling, 2005; Tagg, 2009) have bridged the gap between gender differences and the use of text messages through a cell phone showing that mostly linguistic behaviors are influenced by non-linguistic factors such as age, gender, social class, education, cultural background, the context in which the language takes place, and so on. According to Ling (2005), female teens send more text messages and use more complex syntax such as more salutations, closings, and better punctuation than males. In addition, female's writing and speaking follow more normative standards than those of men. Investigating forms, functions of text messages, and effect of writers' characteristics (age, gender, and SMS-messaging experience) on message length, structure, and function, another study by Bernicot, Volckaert-Legrier, Goumi, and Bert-Erboul (2012), showed similar results as Ling (2005).

The current study intended to explore possible significant differences in the use of positive and negative politeness strategies when male versus female EFL learners text message their professors in L1 and L2. In other words, gender as a sociolinguistic factor might or might not make an important difference in the way males and females apply politeness strategies, that is, the conventions and norms, in text messaging professors. Perceiving politeness as the main communication principle and respecting others' face in a social community, some students cannot employ these strategies to the point, which may cause a misunderstanding.

The focus of the study was on two negative and positive categories of politeness strategies. In the former, the text messages' writer attempts to minimize the imposition on the recipient (e.g., *If you have the chance . . .*, and *Would you close the window?*). The latter indicates a social connection between the writer and the recipient (e.g., *Let's close the window*).

The research findings can contribute to the study of second language acquisition by providing some insights into the politeness strategies and gender differences applying these strategies by Persian-speaking learners of L2 English. This study also can be a reference for EFL learners who are interested in politeness strategies, which are employed in text messaging, especially in an academic and formal situation.

Review of Related Studies

Previous Theoretical and Practical Studies on Text Messaging

As mobile technology is argued to be an important form of communication that plays an important role in communication among people, it is one means of communication

between teachers and students (Kukulka-Hulme & Shield, 2008). A number of studies (Gikas & Grant, 2013; Godwin-Jones, 2007; Kim, Rueckert, Kim, & Seo, 2013; Kukulka-Hulme & Shield, 2008; Li & Hegelheimer, 2013; Ling & Julsrud, 2004; Motiwalla, 2007; Stockwell, 2012; Thornton & Houser, 2005; Wang & Smith, 2013) have been conducted on the use of cell phones in the educational system. One form of academic communication is teacher–student communication in academic contexts. There are two ways through which cell phones allow the communication between teachers and students: (a) oral interaction and (b) SMS. Cell phone communication through SMS is quite a new form of communication. Although in the world of communications there have been various electronic tools, SMS communication has not yet been displaced (Panckhurst, 2013). It also includes all advantages of online communication such as decreasing the distance, creating an area of personal and private space.

Because text messaging is simpler, cheaper, and more immediate than other ways of communication, it is considered a base in communication through cell phone (Rodríguez, Giulianelli, Vera, Trigueros, & Marko, 2009). In their study, Thornton and Houser (2005) reported U.S. and European cell phones initially were provided only by a limited system of text messaging for exchanging SMS.

Previous Theoretical and Practical Studies on Politeness Strategies

Fraser (1990), Cruse (2000), Scollon and Scollon (2001), and Ellen (2001) are the researchers who have developed their own politeness theory and model. In politeness theory, the main concept is referred to face, a feeling of self-worth (Abdul-Majeed, 2009) or self-image (Brown & Levinson, 1978) every person has about himself. Rash (2004) emphasized, although the face is a universal element in all communicative societies, it depends on cross-cultural issues and factors such as the relationship between interactants and the social situation. As Kuntsi (2012) noted, the politeness theory raised by Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson (1978, 1987) is dominated and well known on linguistic politeness. Their theory consists of two parts. The first part refers to nature of politeness in spoken interactions and the second part is on politeness strategies and examples from three languages: English, Tzeltal, and Tamil. They related politeness to face. In their point of view, face has two aspects: positive and negative. The former is considered as a want and willing of everyone to be desirable to others. The latter (Negative Face) is the want and willing of everyone that his actions be unimpeded by others. Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) explain Negative Face as the notion of a formal and non-imposition politeness; and the want to obtain admiring and approving reactions from other members of society is regarded as Positive Face. To account for politeness, Lakoff (1973, 1990) adopted the Grice's construct of Conversational Principles. In her point of view, the construction of the sentence shows politeness or impoliteness of the sentence. Also in his

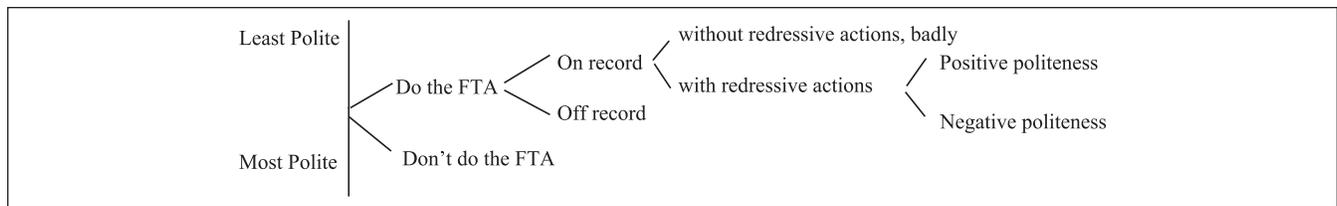


Figure 1. Brown and Levinson's (1987) model for politeness strategies.

Note. FTA = face-threatening act.

own politeness theory, Leech (1983) views politeness as conflict avoidance and considers two, relative (situation oriented) and absolute politeness (speaker oriented).

Being a sub-discipline of pragmatics, politeness is at the focus of attention. Many pragmatic studies (Akutsu, 2006; Chandra, 2009; Chen, 2001; Félix-Brasdefer, 2005; Handayani, 2013; Pishghadam & Navari, 2012; Rash, 2004) show the use of politeness strategies in different situations and contexts such as textbooks, TV advertisements, academic emails, commercial companies' emails, and letters. In daily communication, we should apply language politely to minimize the addressee's face threatening. To behave courteously, we should consider the cultural norms, because a specific norm is acceptable in one culture but not in another one. Communicating with different people who have various social status and position, we use the language, as Chen (2001) argues, which is an indicator of our social and cultural identity. In L2 learning contexts, learners' social and cultural identities determine the language used in the environment and also their language reflects who they are as non-native speakers (NNSs; Chen, 2001). Chen, in her study, investigates distance in terms of the students' familiarity to professors in making requests. The findings showed the requests mailed to the professors whom the students had already no contacts with were coded as high distance. Therefore, it can be inferred that in such situations, where the students did not already communicate with the professors, the students use more formal and polite language, which shows less solidarity and familiarity between professors and students.

Brown and Levinson (1987) placed politeness strategies in five categories that speakers choose in performing face-threatening acts (FTAs): bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, off-record, and no FTA that the risk of face loss grows the further down. Figure 1 shows these five categories (Abdul-Majeed, 2009).

Brown and Levinson (1987) categorized positive and negative politeness strategies into 15 (noticing the listener [L], exaggerating, intensifying interest to L, using in-group identity marker, seeking agreement, avoiding agreement, presupposing/raising/asserting common ground, joking, asserting/presupposing the speaker's [S] knowledge of and concern for L's wants, offering/promising, being optimistic, including both S and H in the activity, giving/asking for reasons, assuming/asserting reciprocity, and giving gifts to L) and 10 (being conventionally indirect, questioning/hedging, being pessimistic, minimizing the imposition, giving deference, apologizing,

impersonalizing, stating the FTA as a general rule, nominalizing, [Go on record as incurring a debt or as not indebteding the listener: to redress an FTA, the speaker can explicitly claim his indebtedness to the listener (e.g. "I'd be eternally grateful if you would ...": the speaker will show his appreciation if the listener do what the speaker requests).

Cross-Gender and Cross-Cultural Studies

Gender as an independent variable in determining language use cannot be isolated (Lorenzo-Dus & Bou-Franch, 2003). For decades, linguistic differences between men and women are being discussed. Linguistic variables such as the type of vocabulary, the function of the message, or the use of politeness conventions are concepts that indicate males and females tend to use language differently (Baron & Campbell, 2012). Because formal written texts such as articles and books are intended for an unseen audience, they lack intentional, phonological, and conversational signs that are involved in speech and to a lesser extent in correspondence. Therefore, nobody expects linguistic differences between men and women in speech, informal writing, and electronic messaging to happen in more formal contexts (Argamon, Koppel, Fine, & Shimoni, 2003).

Sociolinguistic aspect of the language used in SMS, particularly in identifying gender differences, and some cultural aspects have been highlighted by a number of studies (Dittrich, Johansen, & Kulinskaya, 2011; Yuen, Gill, & Noorezam, 2012; Ling, 2005; Lorenzo-Dus & Bou-Franch, 2003; Syahri, 2013). These works have obtained results similar to the findings of Rash's (2004) study, which shows women write longer and more lexical messages using more emoticons and abbreviations, and they also are more polite and prefer positive politeness strategies more than men.

With respect to the relationship between language and context, Takano (2005) suggested, "language is defined not only by the context, but also helps define a context in which particular aspects of speaker-addressee relationships are foregrounded . . ." (p. 657). Takano suggested that to achieve an effective communicative goal, individuals should apply both positive (for reducing social distance and eliciting friendly responses from the subordinates) and negative (for enhancing the speakers' prestige and power) politeness. So many different strategies can be offered to behave politely. In Habwe's (2010) study in which culture-oriented

politeness is evident, in the Muslim's culture, age is one of the politeness strategies that younger people expected to initiate greetings as a way of respecting the elderly. Akbari (2002) conducted a study to explore Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) politeness strategies theory in Persian. He intended to investigate the use of this theory in different languages and cultures. Furthermore, one of the aims of the present study is to compare and contrast positive and negative politeness strategies applied in Iranian EFL learners' text messaging professors using English Brown and Levinson's model. We are also going to explore gender differences in the use of these strategies in text messages.

Method

Research Design

This qualitative and quantitative study was designed to investigate Iranian male and female EFL learners' text messages sent to their professors with respect to the use of positive and negative politeness strategies, based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. The research was conducted on the platform of studying a certain discourse feature of a certain speech act, that is, request with emphasis on identifying gender differences on the use of type of politeness strategies. In addition, data analysis involved codification and interpretation and use of inferential statistics to find out whether the results obtained were significant or occurred just by chance. To this end, chi-square procedure was utilized.

Corpus of the Study

The sample of SMS messages was collected from a sample of 40 BA and MA university students studying EFL. They included both male and female Persian-speaking learners. Their age ranged between 20 and 30. Conducting this research study, the researchers collected a corpus of 300 English and Persian text messages sent by both male and female Iranian EFL learners to their professors. The corpus contains 221 text messages (41 Persian and 181 English) that have been written by females, and the male participants have written 79 short text messages (31 Persian and 48 English) too. The language used in the SMSs was classified with respect to function into four groups: asking questions, requesting, informing, and reminding acts. The length of both Persian and English texts varied from one, the shortest text, to six sentences, the longest one.

Procedures for Data Collection and Data Analysis

This study was based on analysis of a corpus of 300 English and Persian text messages sent by Persian-speaking EFL learners to their professors. In conducting the study, the researchers took the following steps. Most of the messages had been already sent to the professors and were not sent

for the sake of data collection. These messages were natural reflecting the real pragmatic competence of the senders. The messages did not include any personal information and the content was all about exams, assignments, appointments, deadlines, and other academic engagements related to the professors and students. After printing the messages, the data were analyzed and tabulated, modeling the politeness strategies suggested by Brown and Levinson (1987). Then, politeness strategies used by male and female learners in their Persian and English text messages were compared. Finally, SPSS software was used for further analysis of the data. More specifically, chi-square test was applied to analyze the possible significance of the observed differences.

Results

Results of Positive Strategies in L1

First, the positive strategies used in L1 (Persian) and L2 (English) messages were tabulated. Table 1 provides the results referred to positive politeness strategies used in both L1 and L2 text messages. As shown in Table 1, a variety of positive strategies were used by male and female participants.

Having analyzed Table 1, the most striking findings are the following:

- Among the positive strategies, in-group identity markers (address form and contraction and ellipsis) had the most frequency between both females and males. Moreover, the female participants have used strategies more than men.
- Gossip/small talk did not include high statistics, because it has been used by just 1% of males and no females.
- Only 1% of the females and no men preferred intensifying interest to the recipient.

Some L1 examples of positive strategies along with their English translations are presented in the following section.

In-group identity markers. The writer of a text message can implicitly claim the common ground with the addressee that this is carried by definition of the group (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

- a. Address forms: To respect the addressee, the second person plural pronoun of address can be used to soften FTA: *dear, honey, brother, sister, son, mate, sweetheart*, and so forth. Regarding the chi-square test shown in Table 2 ($\chi^2 = 46.352, p = .000$), males and females have applied the strategy differently ($p < .05$).

Ex. 1: Female: سلام استاد ؟ ازتون ؟

Table 1. Results of Positive Politeness Strategies by Iranian EFL Learners in L1 and L2 SMSs.

Positive strategies	Sub-strategies	Female (%)	Male (%)	Total (%)
Notice/attend to the R's needs		5 (1.5)	2 (1)	7 (1.47)
Intensify interest to R		4 (1)	0 (0)	4 (0.81)
Use in-group identity markers	Address form	177 (53.94)	70 (47.94)	247 (51.89)
	Contraction and ellipsis	34 (10)	10 (6.84)	44 (9.24)
Seek agreement	Safe topic	17 (5)	5 (5)	22 (4.62)
	Pseudo-agreement	8 (2.40)	1 (0.68)	9 (1.68)
Presuppose common ground	Gossip/small talk	0 (0)	2 (1)	2 (0.42)
Joke		6 (1.80)	2 (1)	8 (1.68)
Assert knowledge of R's concerns		4 (1.20)	2 (1)	6 (1.26)
Offer/promise		23 (6.92)	16 (11)	39 (8.19)
Be optimistic		4 (1.20)	3 (1)	7 (1.26)
Include both W & R in activity		9 (2.71)	12 (9)	21 (4.41)
Give/ask for a reason		31 (9.33)	16 (11)	47 (9.87)
Give gifts to R		10 (3)	5 (3.54)	15 (3.15)
Total		332	146	478

Note. The results showed that almost half the strategies mentioned by Brown and Levinson were used, 12 of 25. EFL = English as a foreign language; SMS = short message service; R = Receiver; W = Writer.

ET (English Translation): (Hi *professor*, I have a question?)

- b. Contraction and ellipsis: The writer and the recipient must share some knowledge about the context to make the utterance understandable. As the chi-square test in Table 2 shows ($\chi^2 = 13.091, p = .000$), the difference between genders in the use of this strategy is significant ($p < .05$). It means females have applied the contraction and ellipsis strategy more than the males.

Ex. 2: Male: اقدام لازم انجام میگر ددر خصوص اوامرمر بوطه

ET: (Necessary proceedings will be done *about what you said*.)

Seek agreement

- a. Safe topic: The writer seeks ways to agree with the recipient by talking about *weather; beauty of gardens* (in English examples). In Persian, greetings are used as safe topic, the positive strategy (Aliakbari & Toni, 2008). *Hi, hello, روزتون/وقتتون/صبحتون/شبتون بخیر* (ET: *good morning/night*) are the examples of this strategy used by the participants in Persian text messaging their professors. The chi-square test indicated a significant relationship between the frequency observed and expected frequency ($\chi^2 = 6.545, p = .011$). Therefore, it

is notable that the statistical results shown in Table 2 implied the females in our study have used the strategy more than the males ($p < .05$).

Ex. 3: Female: استاد؟ سلام حالتون خوبه

ET: (*Hi. Are you ok professor?*)

Avoid disagreement

- a. Pseudo-agreement: *Then* is an indicator of pseudo-agreement, as a conclusive marker to indicate that the writer is drawing a conclusion to a line of reasoning carried out cooperatively with the addressee. The chi-square test showed $\chi^2 = 5.444, p = .020$. Regarding Table 2 ($p < .05$), gender could make an important difference, that is, the males have preferred pseudo-agreement strategy less than the females.

Ex. 4: Male: پس اون هفته میرسم خدمتون

ET: (*Then see you next week*)

Presuppose common ground

- a. Gossip/small talk: The writer may talk about general, unrelated topics to stress his interest in the addressee to indicate that he has not just come on a specific business or to see the addressee simply do the FTA (e.g., a request). Table 2 shows that only males have used this strategy (0.42% in Persian SMSs).

Ex. 5: Male:...ضمن قبولی طاعات و عبادات حضرت عالی درخصوص اوامر مربوطه اقدام لازم انجام میگرد. متعال و..

ET: (*While passing your worship . . . , necessary proceedings will be done as you said*)

Joke. Jokes are based on mutually shared background knowledge and values and used to put the addressee at ease. In accordance with Table 2, there was no significant difference between genders in the use of this strategy ($\chi^2 = 2, p > .05$).

Ex. 6: Male: بازم تنبلی ما به یه کاری اومد استاد!

ET: (Professor, *our laziness was effective!*)

Offer/promise. The writer shows his good intention in satisfying the recipient's positive face wants by using offer/promise strategy, even if they are false. Table 2 shows no significant relationship between males and females in the use of this strategy: $\chi^2 = 1.25, p = .262; p > .05$.

Ex. 7: Female: رسیدن به اصفهان مزاحم شما به محض میشوم جهت تحویل پایان نامه

ET: (*As soon as arriving in Isfahan, I see you to deliver the thesis*)

Table 2. Chi-Square Tests: Gender and Positive Politeness Strategies in L1.

	AF	C&E	ST	PA	J	O/P	BO	ISR	G/SR	GGR
χ^2	46.3	13.0	6.5	5.44	2	1.25	.14	.42	4.78	1.66
df	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Approximate significance	.0	.0	.01	.20	.15	.262	.70	.51	.029	.197

Note. AF = safe topic; C&E = contraction and ellipsis; ST = seek agreement; PA = pseudo-agreement; J = joke; O/P = offer/promise; BO = be optimistic; ISR = include both sender and receiver; G/SR = gossip/small talk; GGR = give gifts to the receiver.

Be optimistic. The writer of a text message assumes that the addressee wants the recipient's wants for the writer and will help him to obtain them. As it is obvious in Table 2, the statistics showed no significant difference between males and females with regard to applying the "be optimistic" strategy: $\chi^2 = 0.143, p = .705; p > .05$.

Ex. 8: Male: پس شروع کنم دیگه؟

ET: (*Then, I can start, aren't I?*)

Include both the writer and the recipient in activity. The inclusive *we* and *let's* are used when the writer really means *you* and *me*, calling upon cooperative assumptions. Applying chi-square test (Table 2), we could not find any significant relationship between genders using this positive strategy ($\chi^2 = 0.429, p = .513; p > .05$).

Ex. 9: Female: فردا قبل از ظهر یا ساعت سه تا چهار یک جلسه برای ... داشته باشیم

ET: (*Let's have a meeting to . . . tomorrow before noon or at 3:00-4:00 p.m.*)

Give or ask for a reason. This strategy includes the writer in the addressee's reasoning. Table 2 shows a significant result regarding gender and the use of this strategy ($\chi^2 = 4.878, p = .029; p < .05$).

Ex. 10: Males: فصول 1 و 2 ایمیل شد میخواستم بگم

ET: (*I wanted to say I mailed chapters 1 and 2 to you*)

Give gifts to the recipient. We have the classic positive politeness act of gift giving, not only tangible gifts but also human wants such as wanting to be liked, admired, cared about, understood, listened to and so on. Table 2 shows both the male and female participants have used this strategy nearly equally: $\chi^2 = 1.667, p = .197; p > .05$.

Ex. 11: Female: لطف کردید

ET: (*It was kind of you!*)

Generally speaking, the total statistical results shown in Table 3 support no significant difference between male and

Table 3. Results of Chi-Square Test: Gender and Positive Politeness Strategies in L1.

	Value	df	Approximate significance (2-sided)
Pearson χ^2	20.376	13	.086
Likelihood ratio	21.372	13	.066
Linear-by-linear Association	2.356	1	.125
Number of valid cases	478		

female Iranian EFL learners in L1 and L2 text messaging their professors with respect to using positive politeness strategies: $p = .125, p > .05$.

Results of Negative Strategies in L1

Table 4 demonstrates the results of the use of negative politeness strategies in L1 and L2 text messages by the participants sent to their professors.

As far as negative politeness strategies were concerned, both males and female participants had preferred to use the "Give Deference" strategy (70%). However, females had more frequently used this strategy. Table 4 reports the results.

The following are the findings of negative politeness strategies used in L1 text messages by the participants and some examples extracted from the corpus are presented as well.

Be conventionally indirect. After "give difference," the most frequent negative strategy (51.25% by females and 45% by males), it appears that Persian-speaking learners of English have preferred to be conventionally indirect using *could*, *would*, *please* (25% by females and 23.42% by males; Table 4). The results obtained from chi-square test (Table 5) implied a relationship between gender and preference for the use of this negative strategy ($\chi^2 = 24.688, p = .000; p < .05$).

Ex. 12: Male: به نگاهی بندازید لطف

ET: (*Please take a short look*)

Hedge. Hedges are particles, phrases, or expressions that allow the writer to avoid committing to a statement.

Table 4. Results of Negative Politeness Strategies by Iranian EFL Learners in L1 and L2 SMSs.

Negative strategies	Sub-strategies	Female (%)	Male (%)	Total (%)
Be conventionally indirect		100 (25)	41 (23.42)	141 (49)
Question/hedge	Hedges on illocutionary force	7 (1.75)	0 (0)	7 (1)
	Hedges addressed to Grice's maxims	20 (5)	23 (13)	43 (18)
Be pessimistic		18 (4.5)	3 (2)	21 (7)
Minimize the imposition		9 (2.25)	6 (3)	15 (5)
Give deference		205 (51.25)	78 (45)	283 (70)
Apologize	Admit the impingement	13 (3.25)	6 (3)	19 (6)
	Indicate reluctance	4 (1)	0 (0)	4 (1)
	Give overwhelming reasons	6 (1)	6 (3)	12 (4)
	Beg forgiveness	14 (4)	9 (5)	23 (9)
Go on record as incurring a debt		4 (1)	3 (2)	7 (3)
Total		400	175	575

Note. ELF = English as a foreign language; SMS = short message service.

- a. Hedges addressed to Grice's maxims: The third frequent negative strategy used by males is hedges addressed to Grice's maxims (13%). The females would rather use it 20 times (5%) only in English text messages. According to Table 5, there is no important difference between males and females in the use of this strategy ($\chi^2 = 0.209, p = .647; p > .05$).

Ex. 13: Male: فقط میخواستم عرض کنم. . .

ET: (*Just I wanted to say . . .*)

Be pessimistic. Be pessimistic, expressing doubt about the possibility of an event, is realized in subjunctive statements. In Persian text messages, there was no trace of pessimism. In contrast to other negative strategies noted above, the findings showed a meaningful relationship (a significant difference) between the male and female participants using this negative strategy ($\chi^2 = 10.714, p = .001; p < .05$; Table 5).

Ex. 14: Female: . . . اگه واستون امکان داره . . .

ET: (*If it is possible for you . . .*)

Minimize the imposition. Applying this negative strategy, Akbari (2002) suggested we can reduce the tension of the

FTA and the seriousness of the imposition (e.g., *just* and *just a little*). And the findings shown in Table 5 mean the participants' gender has not made any noteworthy difference in the use of this strategy: $\chi^2 = 0.6, p = .439; p > .05$.

Ex. 15: Male: عرض کنم اودمم تشریف استاد فقط میخواستم نداشتید

ET: (Professor, *I just wanted to say I came but you weren't there*)

Give deference. Being preferred most frequently by both the females (51.25) and the males (45%), "give deference" obtained the highest rank among negative strategies. There is a relationship between gender, and the tendency to use this strategy is possible taking into considering the findings ($\chi^2 = 56.99, p = .00; p < .05$), that is, the female participants have applied give deference more than the males.

Ex. 16: Female: سلام استاد صبحتون بخیر

ET: (*Hi professor good morning*)

Apologize

- a. Admit the impingement: The writer admits that he is impinging on the addressee's face. Table 5 shows no meaningful difference between two variables of gender and the use of the strategy ($\chi^2 = 2.579, p = .108; p > .05$).

Ex. 17: Female: ببخشید بد موقع مزاحم میشم

ET: (*I'm sorry to disturb you*)

- b. Give overwhelming reasons: The writer claims there is a reason for him to do FTA. Because males and females used the same strategy equally, we cannot find any noteworthy difference ($\chi^2 = 0.0, p = 1.0; p > .05$; Table 5).

Ex. 18: Female: شرمنده تماس نگرفتم که مزاحم نشم

ET: (*so sorry I didn't call to not disturb you*)

- c. Beg forgiveness: The writer may beg the addressee for forgiveness. The findings indicated this strategy has been used 4% by females and 5% by males: $\chi^2 = 1.087, p = .297; p > .05$.

Ex. 19: Male: بابت تاخیرم شرمندم

ET: (*I'm really sorry for being late*)

Go on record as incurring a debt. The writer can redress an FTA by explicitly claiming his indebtedness to the addressee.

Table 5. Results of Chi-Square Tests: Gender and Negative Politeness Strategies in L1.

	BCI	H	BP	MI	GD	AI	GOR	BF	GRID
χ^2	24.6	0.209	10.7	0.61	56.9	2.57	0	1.08	1.43
df	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Approximate significance	0	0.647	0.001	0.439	0	1.08	1	0.297	0.705

Note. BCI = be conventionally indirect; H = hedge address to Grice's maxims; BP = be pessimistic; MI = minimize the imposition; GD = give difference; AI = admit the impingement; GOR = give overwhelming reasons; BF = beg forgiveness; GRID = go record as incurring debt.

Table 6. Results of Chi-Square Test: Gender and Negative Politeness Strategies in L1.

	Value	df	Approximate significance (2-sided)
Pearson χ^2	23.580	10	.009
Likelihood ratio	25.933	10	.004
Linear-by-linear Association	3.063	1	.080
Number of valid cases	575		

Ex. 20: Female: اگه لطف كنيد نظرتونو اعلام كنيد در رابطه با موضوع ممنون ميشم

ET: (please, if let me know your suggestion about the matter, I appreciate you)

The relationship between observed and expected frequencies had not been meaningful, and it implies gender did not influence the use of this negative strategy ($\chi^2 = 0.143$, $p = .705$; $p > .05$; Table 5).

The final results obtained through chi-square tests in the current study (Table 6) showed no significant difference between gender and the use of negative politeness strategies applied in text messages ($p = .08$, $p > .05$).

Results of Positive Strategies in L2

As it was shown in Table 1, positive politeness strategies were used in both Persian and English text messages by male and female participants. Here, we are going to exemplify the positive strategies used only in L2 text messages. Moreover, because some of the tables related to L1 text messages are the same as those to L2, they have been placed only in the sections "Results of Positive Strategies in L1" and "Results of Negative Strategies in L1"; so, in this section, we proceed only to exemplify and, if necessary, explain the findings concerned with positive and negative politeness strategies used in L2 messages.

Notice the recipient's needs. Applying this strategy, the writer should take notice of aspects of the recipient's condition, that is, anything that looks as though the recipient would want the writer to notice and approve of it. Although in L1 text messages, the participants have preferred not to use this strategy, the statistical results indicated no relationship between

gender and the use of the positive strategy in L2 ones ($\chi^2 = 1.286$, $p = .25$; $p > .05$).

Ex. 21: Male: *As you are so busy . . .*

Intensify interest to the recipient. The writer wants to communicate with the addressee in the way of sharing some of his desires and pulling the addressee right into the middle of the event and conversation being discussed using expressions as *you know, see what I mean, isn't it?* The females were the only participants who used this strategy in their English text messages.

Ex. 22: Female: *You know* I was at work and so busy.

In-group identity markers

a. Address forms

Ex. 23: Female: Hi *professor*. I'm waiting for . . .

b. Contraction and ellipsis

Ex. 24: Female: Why you haven't sent me yet *what we talked about it?*

Seek agreement

a. Safe topic: This strategy was applied more in Persian text messages than English ones.

Ex. 25: Female: *I hope you're fine in this rainy morning.*

Avoid disagreement

a. Pseudo-agreement

Ex. 26: Female: *Then* waiting 4 u 2marrow.

Presuppose common ground

a. Gossip/small talk

Ex. 27: Female: *How's it going? Happy New Year in advance*

Joke

Ex. 28: Female: . . . *I'm a poor girl!* ☹

Table 7. Chi-Square Tests: Gender and Positive Strategies in L2.

	Notice to the recipient's needs	Assert knowledge of the recipient's concerns
χ^2	1.286	0.667
df	1	1
Approximate significance	0.257	0.414

Assert knowledge of the recipient's concerns. By this strategy, we mean the writer of a text message puts pressure on the recipient to cooperate with the writer and assert or imply knowledge of the writer's wants or willingness. As shown in Table 7, no significant difference has been found regarding genders in the use of the strategy ($\chi^2 = 0.667$, $p = .414$; $p > .05$).

Ex. 29: Male: *I know u have a class now but . . .*

Offer/promise

Ex. 30: Female: I'll do that *as soon as possible*.

Be optimistic

Ex. 31: Female and Male: *I am looking forward to . . .*

Include both the writer and the recipient in activity

Ex. 32: Male: *Let's talk about . . .*

Give or ask for a reason

Ex. 33: Females: I'll call u *to see if . . .*

Give gifts to the recipient

Ex. 34: Female: *u r too good to be forgotten*.

Notice to the recipient's needs and assert knowledge of the recipient's concerns are two positive strategies that have not been used in Persian (L1) messages. Table 7 shows the results related to applying the strategies in L2.

Total chi-square test regarding the relationship between gender and the use of positive politeness strategies in L2 is the same as that in L1 (Table 3). In other words, using positive politeness strategies in L2, gender makes no important difference.

Results of Negative Strategies in L2

Negative politeness strategies, which have been applied in both Persian and English text messages by male and female participants, have been preferred more than positive ones (Table 4). It may mean that the participants would rather keep and respect the distance between themselves and their professors.

Be conventionally indirect

Ex. 35: Male: *Would you like to . . .*

Above, the writer minimized the imposition of a request by using an indirect strategy (*would*).

Hedge

a. Hedges on illocutionary force: This strategy has been applied only by female participants messaging their professors in English text. Therefore, this variable is constant, and chi-square test has not been calculated.

Ex. 36: Female: *I wonder if you might set a time for me so that i can talk to you*.

b. Hedges addressed to Grice's maxims:

Ex. 37: Male: *I think that we will hopefully be able to . . .*

Be pessimistic

Ex. 38: Male: *If you let me, I'd like to . . .*

Minimize the imposition

Ex. 39: Male: Dear professor I know you have a class now, but *just a little question!?*

Give deference

Ex. 40: Male: Hello *sir*. I attached my paper. Please take a look at it.

Apologize

a. Admit the Impingement

Ex. 41: Female: *I'm terribly sorry for taking your nice time*.

b. Indicate reluctance: The writer can attempt to show that he is reluctant to impinge on the recipient with the use of hedges or expressions.

Ex. 42: Female: *i don't wanna disturb you*.

c. Give overwhelming reasons:

Ex. 43: Male: Excuse me I wanted to answer you sooner *but there was some problem . . .*

d. Beg forgiveness:

Ex. 44: Male: *Sorry for delay*

Go on record as incurring a debt

Ex. 45: Male: *I will be very happy if you have any general comments . . .*

Discussion

Politeness Strategies

Regarding the observations of this study, the participants would rather apply some certain positive and negative politeness strategies mentioned in Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory in text messaging their professors, which they thought were suitable for an academic context. Intensify interest to the recipient, hedges on the illocutionary force, and indicate reluctance were, respectively, positive and negative strategies used only by the females. Gossip/small talk was the only positive strategy that was preferred only by the males.

The findings of analyzing the corpus (300 Persian and English text messages) showed negative strategies (575 times) were more preferred than positive ones (478 times) by Iranian EFL learners (Persian-speaking learners of English). This means the participants mostly preferred to use a negative strategy in text messaging their professors as conveying respect, deference, and distance rather than demonstrate friendliness and involvement applying positive ones. These results are similar to Zaire and Mohammadi's (2012) research in which they disapproved *please plus imperative* utterances as indirect requests and politeness, confirming Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig's (1996) claim that the marker *please* alone cannot mitigate or soften the force of imperatives in student–faculty communication. Some of the participants, however, applied positive strategies to show intimacy and close relationships with their own professors.

The results of this study do not lend support to Zaire and Mohammadi's (2012) research in which they concluded that NNSs' English emails were not overly embellished with politeness features and such direct emails failed to create polite messages to professors; so they caused pragmatic failure. The study also shows the participants have used negative strategies, and it may mean indirectness has been preferred by EFL learners whereas Zaire and Mohammadi (2012) suggested directness is very common in EFL students' emails to their professors. The setting, context, individual characteristics, position, rank, and distance between students and their professors can influence the choice of language and politeness strategies in a hybrid (both written and spoken language) medium such as SMS.

Although some politeness strategies mentioned in Brown and Levinson's politeness theory have been criticized for such features as being ambiguous partially, overlapping each other, and being difficult to detect, a number of researchers have used the model to explain their studies' findings and also many psychologists have declared the theory to be one of the most influential politeness models (Gilks, 2010). Kitamura (2000), for instance, concluded that Brown and Levinson's model can be a powerful tool to analyze politeness phenomena.

Relationship Between Gender and the Use of Politeness Strategies

It is worth noting that gender is so salient because it is a social construct and it does not exist independently of other

social factors such as ethnicity, age, class, culture, religion, rank, and position. As far as politeness strategies and their relationship with gender concerned both male and female participants used negative strategies more than positive ones. This might indicate the participants' preference for keeping some distance between themselves and their professors. Chen (2001) aimed to reveal requesting strategies in an academic context with cultural influence. Chen claimed that students' perception of professor's high position and power affect the discourse style of their email requests.

A multitude of studies (Fishman, 1978; Holmes, 1993; Lorenzo-Dus & Bou-Franch, 2003; Tannen, 1990) on differences in men's and women's speech styles, especially linguistic politeness, have shown both genders followed politeness in their requests though there were similarities and differences in their perceptions regarding the expression of solidarity and deference. Moreover, women are more likely than men to express positive politeness and to use mitigating strategies to avoid or minimize threatening their interlocutor's face. Although the studies suggest more positive strategies preferred by women, our study showed the findings, which implies females have preferred more negative strategies to reduce FTA and respect professors (recipients). In reply to the second research question, after calculating chi-square tests, it was revealed that there was no meaningful relationship between observed and expected frequencies. In other words, no significant difference was discovered between male and female EFL learners who have applied both positive and negative politeness strategies in L1 and L2 text messaging their professors.

Conclusion

In the current study, an attempt was made to analyze positive and negative politeness strategies in Iranian EFL learners' L1 and L2 text messaging their professors at the University of Kashan, Iran. Based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, it was found out the participants have applied those politeness strategies, which are appropriate to academic contexts. This study put emphasis on the relationship between gender and text messages with respect to using positive and negative politeness strategies. Although the female participants preferred to use negative strategies more than male participants, the obtained results revealed no significant difference between gender and the use of politeness strategies. In other words, there was no significant difference in the use of positive and negative politeness strategies in males' and females' text messages. Hence, the research study refuted our hypothesis.

Implications of the Study

As this study attempted to investigate one of the most significant areas in pragmatics, it has theoretical implications for both teachers and students. Indeed, we concentrated our focus on positive and negative politeness strategies that EFL

learners used to text message a high social rank addressee, that is, their own professors, in L1 (Persian) and L2 (English). By conducting the research, we intended to make EFL learners aware of courteous enough behavior. In addition, they also should apply suitable politeness strategies in an academic context. Students might find the findings of the study useful and add to their body of knowledge, especially pragmatics knowledge. That is, how to distinguish between language usage and language use, to develop their pragmatics knowledge, and to prevent the transfer of L1 pragmatic knowledge.

Raising learners' pragmatic awareness, helping them to apply it, and giving them feedback are the roles that a teacher should play. Teachers also should be aware of the differences that might cause the negative transfer minimizing native cultural interference and preventing the impolite, ineffective, or inappropriate behaviors.

Last but not least, the study has some pedagogical implications for syllabus and textbook designers, those who might use the findings of this study to provide activities related to a real life and help EFL learners to get engaged in a real world and to practice realizing offers under different contextual determinants. In other words, they should practically know the difficulties they might face in performing FTAs with native-like politeness and patterns, forcing them to pay more attention to the pragmatic aspects of L2 learning (Zhu, 2004).

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

This study was conducted within a certain context with its own limitations. This study relied on a corpus of SMS messages from one single university campus. Further research is needed to include samples of a much wider university students. Also, L1 in the context of this study was Persian. Participants with different mother tongue may produce different results. Among different politeness strategies, only positive and negative politeness strategies were analyzed. Further research may include analysis of other three super strategies (bald-on-record, off-record, and no FTA) in the Brown and Levinson's model. In addition to gender as a factor that may influence the use of politeness strategy, other factors such as addressees' gender, age, background, knowledge of learners in L2, and the social status of students' families may play a part in this regard. Having been done in both Persian (L1) and English (L2), this study did not take the effect of students' original culture, beliefs, thought structure, the structure of language, and English background and knowledge in constructing those text messages (e.g., choosing words) into account, too.

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