

Request Strategies in Everyday Interactions of Persian and English Speakers

SAGE Open
October-December 2016: 1–11
© The Author(s) 2016
DOI: 10.1177/2158244016679473
sagepub.com


Shiler Yazdanfar¹ and Alireza Bonyadi¹

Abstract

Cross-cultural studies of speech acts in different linguistic contexts might have interesting implications for language researchers and practitioners. Drawing on the Speech Act Theory, the present study aimed at conducting a comparative study of request speech act in Persian and English. Specifically, the study endeavored to explore the request strategies used in daily interactions of Persian and English speakers based on directness level and supportive moves. To this end, English and Persian TV series were observed and requestive utterances were transcribed. The utterances were then categorized based on Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's Cross-Cultural Study of Speech Act Realization Pattern (CCSARP) for directness level and internal and external mitigation devices. According to the results, although speakers of both languages opted for the direct level as their most frequently used strategy in their daily interactions, the English speakers used more conventionally indirect strategies than the Persian speakers did, and the Persian speakers used more non-conventionally indirect strategies than the English speakers did. Furthermore, the analyzed data revealed the fact that American English speakers use more mitigation devices in their daily interactions with friends and family members than Persian speakers.

Keywords

cross-cultural studies, pragmatic competence, speech acts, requests, directness level

Introduction

Cultures have developed particular verbal behaviors and politeness devices, which vary from language to language. Based on their pragmatic and sociolinguistic parameters, people in different countries use and interpret verbal behaviors rather differently, and these differences and the lack of an awareness of these differences may cause misunderstandings and communication breakdowns particularly when cross-cultural communication takes place. Speech acts in general and requests as one of the important speech acts are very vulnerable to be misunderstood. It is believed that pragmatic errors are considered by native speakers to be more serious than phonological or syntactic errors (Kiok, 1995; Thomas, 1983; Wolfson, 1989).

To make appropriate requests in another language, learners need to acquire both pragmatic and socio-pragmatic knowledge to avoid being considered rude or impolite by native speakers. So it seems vital for learners of a language to acquire sufficient knowledge of speech acts of the target language (in addition to grammatical knowledge and vocabulary) to avoid these kinds of communication problems.

Cross-cultural investigations of speech act patterns in different languages can serve this purpose. They can find different strategies native speakers use and also can pinpoint

similarities and differences across languages. Chen & Chen (2007) mentioned,

This study was an effort to find the way native Persian and English speakers use request strategies in their daily interactions. Definitions of some technical words are provided prior to related literature.

Pragmatics

Pragmatics is the study of how language is affected by the context in which it occurs. The aspects that can affect the language can be the relationship between the speakers in a conversation, the context, or preceding utterances (Parker & Riley, 1994). According to Yule (1996), pragmatics is “the study of intended speaker meaning” (p. 3). Pragmatic competence, which is the ability to perform language functions appropriately in social context, has been considered to be an essential part of the communicative competence after several

¹Islamic Azad University of Urmia, Iran

Corresponding Author:

Alireza Bonyadi, English Department, Urmia Branch, Islamic Azad University, Urmia, Iran.
Email: bonyad80@hotmail.com



theoretical models of communicative competence were introduced by Canale and Swain (1980), Bachman (1990), and Bachman and Palmer (1996). Before the emergence of these models, for long years, second language ability had been equated with linguistic accuracy, but it was proven that mastery over grammatical forms and lexical and phonological knowledge was not enough for successful communication and as Wannaruk (2008) mentioned, “communication breakdowns can occur during cross-cultural communication due to different perceptions and interpretations of appropriateness and politeness” (p. 318). To be communicatively competent, speakers should have the knowledge of using language appropriately according to contextual factors.

Speech Acts

John Austin (1962) referred to speech acts for the first time in his book *How to Do Things With Words*, where he said, “in uttering a sentence one can do things as well as say things” (cited in Parker & Riley, 1994). Speech acts are considered to have three facets: a locutionary act (the description of what somebody says), an illocutionary act (the speaker’s intention in uttering something), and a perlocutionary act (the action done as a result of the illocutionary force of an utterance).

Searle (1975) classified illocutionary acts into six types:

1. Representative: to describe state of affairs (confessing, stating, asserting, etc.).
2. Directive: to have someone do something (requesting, forbidding, warning, ordering, etc.).
3. Question: to get someone to provide information (asking, inquiring, etc.).
4. Commissive: to commit the speaker to do something (promising, vowing, pledging, etc.).
5. Expressive: to express speaker’s emotional state (apologizing, thanking, congratulating).
6. Declaration: to change the status of some entity (naming, appointing, resigning, etc.).

Direct Versus Indirect Illocutionary Act

Illocutionary acts are stated directly when syntactic form of the utterance matches its illocutionary force. Each type of sentences is associated with a particular illocutionary act, for example, when an expressive is delivered by an exclamatory, or a request by an imperative, it is delivered directly. In many cases, especially in requests (a kind of directive), using a direct speech act can be considered impolite or rude. So, to mitigate or soften the effect of speech acts, speakers may choose to state their utterances indirectly, that is, by using a syntactic form, which does not match the illocutionary force of the utterance (Parker & Riley, 1994). In addition to politeness, Thomas (1983) believed that “people use indirect strategies when they want to make their speech more interesting,

when they want to reach goals different from their partners, or when they want to increase the face of the message communicated” (p. 143). Higher levels of indirectness are believed to result in higher levels of politeness.

Politeness Theory

Politeness involves considering feelings of others and making others feel comfortable. Goffman (1967) described politeness as “the perception an individual shows to another through avoidance or presentation of rituals” (p. 77). Politeness serves to avoid conflicts, which may arise during a conversation between the participants. One way of showing politeness is to use indirect speech acts. According to Brown and Levinson’s (1978) politeness theory, “People tend to choose indirect forms over direct ones to show politeness, since being direct is face-threatening” (p. 78). Leech (1983) mentioned it is possible to increase the degree of politeness by using more indirect illocutions “. . . a) because they increase the degree of optionality, and b) because the most indirect the illocution is, the more diminished and tentative its force tends to be” (p. 131).

Face and Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs)

The idea of face was proposed by Erving Goffman in the year 1967. He defined face as a mask that changes depending on audience and the social interaction. The idea of face can be different in different cultures and social circumstances. Every speaker of a language has a self-image, which she or he wishes to maintain when she or he is in communication with others. Face “can be lost, maintained, or enhanced and must constantly be attended to in interactions” (Goffman, 2006, pp. 299, 310). Brown and Levinson (1978) defined *negative face* as our need to act without imposition and *positive face* as our desire to be liked and admired by others. They use the term *face-threatening acts* to refer to acts such as disapproval or contempt, which challenge a person’s positive face, and acts such as requests for action, which limit a person’s freedom and challenge his or her negative face. Many misunderstandings and breakdowns in communication may result from FTAs.

Negative and Positive Politeness

Based on which face people attempt to save, Brown and Levinson (1987) mentioned two kinds of politeness: *positive politeness*, which saves hearer’s positive face and which indicates solidarity with the audience. People show positive politeness by using conversation strategies such as informal pronunciation, slangs, and indirect requests. *Negative politeness*, which saves hearer’s negative face, indicates deference and gives importance to others’ wants and concerns. The strategies used by people to show negative politeness can

include indirect and impersonal requests and using mitigating devices such as please, might, and so on. Negative politeness occurs when a social distance exists between the speaker and audience.

Request Speech Act

Ellis (1994) defined requests as “an attempt on the part of the speaker to get the hearer to perform or to stop performing some kind of action” (p. 167). According to Searle’s (1969) classification of illocutionary acts, requests belong to the category of *directives*, which are defined as “an attempt to get the hearer to do an act which the speaker wants and which it is not obvious that hearer will do in the normal course of events of hearer’s own accord” (p. 66). Brown and Levinson (1987) categorized requests as FTA, because the speaker imposes his or her will on the hearer. They suggest when people want to do an FTA, they might try to mitigate its effect on the hearer’s face. Depending on the seriousness or weightiness of the FTA, the speaker chooses different strategies. Variables the speakers consider are *the degree of imposition, the relative power of the hearer, and the social distance between the speaker and the hearer*. Because a request is a kind of imposition on the hearer, the speaker had better avoid a direct request in most circumstances (Yule, 1996). It is vital that speakers use appropriate form of requests; otherwise, they might look rude or impolite, and this can lead to communication problems. According to Brown and Levinson (1987) and Leech (1983), direct requests are considered to be impolite, because they limit the hearer’s freedom, and indirectness is a way speakers prefer to increase the degree of politeness.

Cross-Cultural Study of Speech Act Realization Patterns (CCSARP)

This project is an effort to empirically study the speech acts of requests and apologies in eight languages (Australian English, American English, British English, Canadian French, Danish, German, Hebrew, and Russian). The goal of the project is to compare across these languages with respect to these speech acts and establish native speakers’ patterns and also find similarities and differences between native and non-native speakers of mentioned languages. Based on decreasing degree of directness, they classified requests strategies into three levels of directness and nine strategy types (examples are provided in Appendix A):

1. *The most direct explicit level*: including mood derivable, explicit performatives, hedged performatives, locution derivable, and scope stating.
2. *The conventionally indirect level*: including language-specific suggestory formulas and reference to preparatory condition.

3. *The non-conventionally indirect level*: including strong hints and mild hints.

Modification Devices

To soften the impact of requests as FTAs, speakers also use some external and internal modifications whose function can be either to mitigate or aggravate the request.

External Modifiers

These modifiers, which are also called “Adjunct to the head Acts,” occur in the immediate context of the speech act, and they are optional clauses, which indirectly modify the illocutionary force. Some categories offered by Edmondson (1981), Edmondson and House (1989), and House and Kasper (1981) are as follows:

Checking on availability: for example, “Are you going in the direction of the town? And if so, is it possible to join you?” (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984, p. 205)

- *Getting a pre-commitment*: for example, “Will you do me a favor? Could you perhaps lend me your notes for a few days?” (p. 205)
- *Grounder*: for example, “Judith, I missed class yesterday, could I borrow your notes?” (p. 205)
- *Sweetener*: for example, “You have beautiful handwriting, would it be possible to borrow your notes for a few days?” (p. 205)
- *Disarmer*: for example, “Excuse me, I hope you don’t think I’m being forward, but is there any chance of a lift home?” (p. 205)
- *Cost minimizer*: for example, “Pardon me, but could you give me a lift, if you’re going my way, as I just missed the bus and there isn’t another one for an hour.” (p. 205)

Internal Modifiers

These modifiers that appear within the speech act are supportive moves, which can be either downgraders (to mitigate) or upgraders (to enhance) the illocutionary force of the request.

- A. Downgraders: which in turn are divided into Syntactic downgraders and Lexical downgraders.
 - a. Syntactic downgraders:
 - *Interrogative*: for example, “Could you do the cleaning up?” (p. 203)
 - *Negation*: for example, “Look, excuse me. I wonder if you wouldn’t mind dropping me home?” (p. 203)
 - *Past tense*: for example, “I wanted to ask for a postponement.” (p. 203)

- *Embedded “if” clause*: for example, “I would appreciate it if you left me alone.” (p. 204)
 - b. Lexical (phrasal) downgraders:
 - *Consultative devices*: for example, “Do you think I could borrow your lecture notes from yesterday?” (p. 204)
 - *Understaters*: for example, “Could you tidy up a bit before I start?” (p. 204)
 - *Hedges*: for example, “It would really help if *you did something* about the kitchen.” (p. 204)
 - *Downtoners*: for example, “Will you be able perhaps to drive me?” (p. 204)
- B. Upgraders:
 - *Intensifiers*: for example, “Clean up this mess, it’s disgusting.” (p. 204)
 - *Expletives*: for example, “You still haven’t cleaned up that bloody mess!” (p. 204)

Related Literature

Research in the field of request speech acts can be divided into three main categories: single language, interlanguage pragmatic approach (ILP), and cross-cultural studies.

Single Language Studies

These studies investigated the request strategies in a single language, without comparing it with other languages. Not many studies fall in this group.

Rue, Zhang, and Shin (2007) investigated request strategies in Korean. They attempted to study Korean native speakers’ use of request strategies in connection with the level of directness. They also investigated the effect of power and distance on the performance of request. The participants were 12 office workers. CCSARP was applied to analyze data. The results revealed Korean was based on status of power. More indirect strategies are used for higher power addressees. In general, speakers preferred conventionally indirect request strategies.

In another study, Shams and Afghari (2011) investigated the effect of gender and culture on the comprehensibility of indirect requests using a questionnaire in Persian, including 20 items in each of which a situation was described and an indirect request was implied. The participants were 30 people (15 males and 15 females) from Gachsaran and 30 people (15 males and 15 females) from Farokhshahr. The results showed the significant effect of culture on the interpretation of indirect speech act, whereas gender had no effect.

The notions of indirectness and politeness in the speech act of requests were investigated by Felix-Brasdefer (2005) among native speakers of Mexican Spanish in formal and

informal situations. The data were collected from four males and six females using a role-play instrument. The results revealed the more distant the relationship between the interlocutors is, the more indirect requests will be used.

ILP

These studies investigate the learners’ development and use of pragmatic knowledge in second language context. This kind of research has been widely done in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a second Language (ESL) area. This part can be more divided into (a) studies that investigated the importance of instruction and (b) those that just investigated how SL learners approximate NSs in their use of speech acts.

Studies that investigated the importance of instruction. Xiaole (2011) aimed at investigating the effect of explicit and implicit instructions of request strategies on gaining the pragmatic knowledge in online communication of Chinese EFL learners. Two groups of learners (explicit group [EG] and implicit group [IG]) were instructed differently and were given a pre-test and a post-test consisting of a written discourse completion task and a role-play. Results revealed greater progress of the EG, which suggests the importance of using consciousness-raising activities in teaching pragmatics.

The importance of explicit teaching was also indicated in the study done by Farahian, Rezaee, and Gholami (2012) who studied the effectiveness of explicit instruction of refusals on four types of speech acts, namely, invitations, suggestions, offers, and requests. Participants were 64 Iranian intermediate university students aged 19 to 25. Based on the findings, they came to conclusion that explicit instruction of refusals increased second Language (SL) pragmatic ability of the experimental group.

Vahid Dastjerdi and Rezvani (2010) did not come to the same conclusion as Xiao-lee (2011) and Farahian et al. (2012), for they showed both explicit and implicit instructions were effective on EFL learners’ request strategies. They studied the effect of two instructional paradigms, that is, explicit versus implicit instruction on English learners’ ability of using request speech acts. One hundred twenty Iranian intermediate EFL learners were randomly divided into three groups of EG, IG, and control group (CG). The results indicated the significant effect of both explicit and implicit instruction on learners’ production of request strategies in English:

Those that just investigated how SL learners approximate NSs in their use of speech acts. Native Speakers (NS) Umar (2004) compared the request strategies used by Arab learners of English with the strategies used by native English speakers (NESs). The participants were 20 Arab students in four Arabic universities and 20 British students in three British

universities. Using a discourse completion test (DCT) to generate data, the researcher came to conclusion that the two groups used similar strategies when making a request to equals or people in higher rank. They used conventionally indirect strategies in these conditions. For lower position addressees, the Arabic sample has tendency toward using more direct requests than the British. It was also found that NESs use more semantic and syntactic modifiers; that is why their requests appear to be more polite.

In another study, Jalilifar (2009) conducted a study on 69 BA and MA Persian EFL learners and 10 Australian native speakers of English to find strategies used by each group. To obtain data, he used a DCT. The results revealed that as proficiency level increases, learners' use of direct requests decreases, but conventional and non-conventional, types of requesting increase, and also there is overuse of direct requests with lower level learners and overuse of conventionally indirect requests with mid-level learners.

Degree of familiarity and social power were two factors based on which Memarian (2012) investigated Persian graduate students' use of request strategies. She aimed at determining any potential sign of pragmatic transfer from their first language. She administered a DCT to 100 graduate students studying at Eastern Mediterranean University and also to two baseline groups of British English native speakers and Persian native speakers. The data were coded according to CCSARP and were analyzed by the use of SPSS program. The results revealed possible signs of transfer regarding some specific situations in the DCT. Some evidence was also found regarding the development of interlanguage by Persian graduate students. Iranians indicated a need for more education on the choice of strategies with respect to factors of social power and degree of familiarity.

Cross-Cultural Studies

These studies investigate how a particular speech act is realized in different languages to find the patterns and strategies native speakers of a language use and also to find the similarities and differences between languages mostly to investigate universal principles in speech act realizations.

Hilbig (2009) tried to explore request strategies in Lithuanian and British English. The researcher used the principles from Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper's (1989) CCSARP. The data were collected from 100 Lithuanian and 100 English university undergraduates using DCT and also an open-ended questionnaire, which included 12 socially divergent situations to prompt requests. According to the findings, both groups used conventionally indirect requests, but the Lithuanian respondents used more direct strategies (e.g., imperatives) and non-conventionally indirect strategies (e.g., hints) and Lithuanians had a tendency to use more positive politeness strategies.

Indirectness and politeness are areas in cross-cultural studies that have attracted many researchers. Tawalbeh and

Al-Oqaily (2012), for instance, investigated the notion of directness and politeness in requests of native Saudi Arabic speakers in comparison with Native American English speakers. A DCT consisting of 12 written situations was given to 30 Saudi and American undergraduate students. The results revealed that Americans used conventional indirectness as their most favorite strategy. Depending on the power and distance variables, Saudi students used varied kinds of request strategies.

Request modification is another aspect of request strategies, which have been investigated by researchers. In 2012, Hans made a contrastive study of British English and Mandarin Chinese to find the similarities and differences between these two languages with regard to request modifications used by speakers. Sixteen native speakers of British English and 20 native speakers of Chinese performed the role-plays, which were constructed in English and Chinese. The results revealed the effect of some social variables such as power and distance on the choice of modifications.

In another study, Eslamirasekh (1993) made a cross-cultural comparison of patterns in the requests of 50 and 50 American native speakers under the same social constraints. She used controlled elicitation (open questionnaire) to gather data and used CCSARP to code them based on the degree of directness. According to the results, Persian speakers used more direct requests than American speakers and more alerters, supportive moves, and internal modifiers. These strategies are used by Persian speakers to compensate for the level of directness.

Studying all these articles, the researchers noticed there is a gap in studies related to request speech act. First, few studies investigated the cross-cultural differences of requests in Persian and English. To the researchers' best knowledge, there is just one study with this topic, namely, Eslamirasekh (1993), which was done almost a decade ago. Second, in most of the cases, the tool in eliciting data was a role-play or a DCT. As Tatton (2008) mentioned, "we might question whether we can assume that the responses [gathered through the use of the DCT] are reflective of what would occur in natural discourse" (p. 2). He suggests that "further research be done in this area using recordings of natural day-to-day conversations" (p. 2). In the current study, the data will be collected through a naturalistic view, that is, through examining request strategies used by speakers in English and Persian TV series.

Research Questions

1. In their daily interactions, how do Persian and English speakers use request strategies with regard to directness level?
2. In their daily interactions, how do English and Persian speakers use request strategies with regard to internal and external modification devices?

Method

Corpus

The data were gathered through observing American English and TV series. The first 300 requestive utterances that appeared in American TV series and the first 300 requestive utterances that appeared in Persian TV series were transcribed.

Instruments/Materials

The tool for gathering data was through TV series conversations. Fernandez-Guerra (2008) made a comparison of occurrences of request strategies and mitigation devices in TV series and spoken corpora. Although some slight differences in some type of requests were found, he claimed requesting behavior in TV series resembles natural discourse and is a useful language resource. The TV series chosen were *Desperate Housewives*, as the American English sample, and *Ghalbe Yakhi* (Frozen Hearts) as the sample. *Desperate Housewives* is an American TV comedy-mystery-drama series directed by Marc Cherry, which aired on ABC studio from 2004 until 2012 in eight seasons. It won Primetime Emmy, Golden Globe, and Screen Actors' Guild Award and was reported the most popular show with an audience of almost 120 million. *Ghalbe Yakhi* is a home network entertainment series in three seasons and 57 episodes. The reasons for choosing these two series were their being teemed with everyday conversations and thus being full of requestive utterances.

Procedure and Data Analysis

The classification proposed by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) in CCSARP was applied. In this model, first three segments are recognized for request utterances: (a) Address Term, (b) Head Act, (c) Adjunct(s) to Head act. For example, in the sentence,

Mary, would you lend me some money. I should pay my tuition by the end of this week.

- "Mary" is the Address term.
- "would you . . ." is the Head act.
- "I should pay . . ." is the Adjunct to Head act.

Only the Head act is realized in classifying the levels of directness in requests.

To gather the data, all 600 requestive utterances were placed under appropriate category in CCSARP directness level, and the frequency of each category was calculated. Also, they were categorized based on the used external and internal mitigation devices (if any), and the frequency of their appearance was calculated.

Data Analysis

This part deals with the distribution of request strategies used by native Persian speakers (NPSs) and NESs in mentioned

Table 1. Comparing Request Strategies Used by NPSs and NESs.

Request strategies	English	Persian
Mood derivable	151	190
Explicit performative	7	16
Hedged performative	5	2
Locution derivable	13	27
Scope stating	42	15
Language-specific suggestory formula	5	4
Reference to preparatory condition	64	19
Strong hint	13	27
Mild hint	0	0

Note. NPS = native Persian speaker; NES = native English speaker.

TV series. To this end, the requests uttered in TV series in Persian and English were transcribed and categorized according to Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's (1989) model of directness levels and mitigation devices. Research questions are mentioned prior to presenting the tables, which provide the answers for the questions.

Research Question 1: In their daily interactions, how do Persian and English speakers use request strategies with regard to directness level?

Table 1 shows the frequency of different types of request strategies used by English and Persian speakers.

As can be inferred from Table 1, although the majority of speakers in both Persian and English series opted for *mood derivable* strategy, NPSs used it more than NESs, 190 and 151 requests, respectively. NPSs also used *explicit performatives* more often. They did not indicate a big difference in the use of *hedged performative*, although NESs used this strategy slightly more frequently than NPSs. NPSs also indicated a greater interest in using Locution derivable strategy than NESs did. They used it in 27 utterances, whereas NPSs used it just in 13 requests. As can be inferred from Table 1, a significant difference can be seen in the frequencies with which English and Persian speakers used Scope stating. The English used it almost 3 times as much as the Persian did, that is, 42 compared with 15 utterances. Numbers were closer with regard to the *suggestory formula*. Another big difference can be noticed in the seventh strategy, being *reference to preparatory condition*. NESs demonstrated a marked preference for this strategy and used it as their second favored request strategy, in 64 cases, whereas NPSs used it much less than NESs did, that is, just in 19 requests. NPSs, however, opted for *strong hint* as their second most frequent strategy and used it in 27 requests; NESs used them in 13 requests. *Mild hints* were absent in both NPSs and NESs requests. All in all, there seems to be a difference in the request strategies NESs and NPSs used in these TV series. Although both opted for *mood derivable*, which belongs to the most direct level, as the most frequent strategy they use in majority of their

requests, NESs used *reference to preparatory condition*, a conventional indirect strategy much more than NPSs did, and NPSs applied *strong hint*, in non-conventional indirect level, with a higher frequency than NESs did. Examples of English and Persian requests are given in Appendix B.

Research Question 2: In their daily interactions, how do Persian and English speakers use request strategies with regard to external and internal mitigation devices.

All 600 transcribed request strategies were categorized once more based on different types of mitigation devices used. Although all used strategies in both English and Persian TV series would fit in one of the directness subcategories, not all used strategies contained an internal or external mitigation device, that is, English and Persian speakers did not use these devices in all the requests. Persian speakers used these devices much less than the English speakers did. From all 300 transcribed requests, only 67 requests contained a mitigating device, whereas 119 transcribed English requests consisted of at least one external or internal (or both) mitigation device. To be more precise,

All transcribed English requests: 300

English requests containing mitigation devices (internal, external, and mixed): 135

All transcribed Persian requests: 300

Persian requests containing mitigation devices (internal, external, and mixed): 70

The classification of external and internal mitigation devices in the current study is based on Edmondson (1981), Edmondson and House (1989), and House and Kasper (1981), which is mentioned in Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1989). There are some other classifications, which include other subcategories not mentioned here. One of these subcategories is the word “*Please*,” which is a lexical downgrader. Because it is a very common mitigation device, the researchers included it in Table 2. Used external mitigation devices are shown in Table 3.

As can be seen in Table 2, English speakers used more internal mitigation devices in their daily interactions (110 out of 300 transcribed requests) than Persian speakers (51 out of 300 transcribed requests). Interrogatives are the most frequently used internal device by English speakers in the studied TV series. Understaters were the only devices that were noticeably used more by Persian speakers. These devices are some words such as “a bit,” “small,” and so on, which can minimize the requested action or the object. The English also used the politeness marker “please” much more frequently than the Persian did. Examples of internal mitigation devices are provided in Appendix C.

Compared with internal mitigation devices, external devices were not used very often. However, Persian speakers showed a greater tendency to use them. Among different types of external mitigation devices, grounders (reasons) were the most preferred strategies by both English and Persian speakers.

Table 2. Used Internal Mitigation Devices by NESs and NPSs.

Internal devices	English	Persian
Downgraders		
Syntactic downgraders		
Interrogative	43	11
Negation	4	1
Past tense	3	0
Embedded if clause	8	10
Lexical downgraders		
Consultative device	4	1
Understater	3	12
Hedge	2	1
Downtoner	4	0
Politeness marker “please”	24	5
Upgraders		
Time intensifiers	10	8
Expletives	5	2
Total internal mitigations	110	51

Note. NES = native English speaker; NPS = native Persian speaker.

Table 3. Used External Modification Devices by NESs and NPSs.

External mitigation device	English	Persian
1. Checking on availability	0	0
2. Getting a pre-commitment	2	2
3. Grounder (reason)	6	5
4. Sweetener	0	4
5. Disarmer	0	2
6. Cost minimizer	1	3
Total	9	16

Note. NES = native English speaker; NPS = native Persian speaker.

In addition to mentioned external and internal mitigation devices, there were some utterances in which two internal mitigation devices or both internal and external mitigation devices are used. These *Mixed Mitigations* were seen more in English requests (N.16) than in Persian requests (N. 3). Some examples are offered below:

English:

Could you *possibly* take it easy? (Interrogative and downtoner)

I would really appreciate it if you said something. (Embedding, intensifier, and hedge)

There is something I would like to ask you. Can’t we just work it out? (Getting a pre-commitment, negation, and interrogative)

Man ye xaheshe kuchik azat daram. Mitunam karte shoma ro dashte basham? (I need a little favor. Could I have your card?) (Understate, interrogative, and getting a pre-commitment)

Ye toke pa tashrif miavarid? (Would you here come a second?) (Understater and interrogator)

Mitunam ye xaheshi azat dashte basham? Mituni befrestish unvar? (May I ask for a favor? Can you send him abroad?) (Getting a pre-commitment and interrogative)

Discussions of the Study

After classifying all request strategies uttered in Persian and English TV series according to Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's (1984) directness level, the researchers noticed both NESs and NPSs used Mood derivable strategy as their most frequently used strategy in their daily conversations. This strategy belongs to the most direct level in the model proposed by the abovementioned authors.

With regard to NPSs, this result accords with the findings of Eslamirasekh (1993) that "Persian speakers use significantly more direct strategies" (p. 91). However, it is in contrast with the findings of Shams and Afghari (2011) and Salmani (2008) who believed that Iranian participants use indirect requests rather than direct ones.

The preference of direct strategies by speakers of a language cannot be taken as a proof that they are not polite. According to Brown and Levinson's (1978) politeness theory, people use indirect forms to indicate politeness. Reexamining the concepts of politeness and indirectness, Blum-Kulka (1987) investigated native speakers' perceptions of these two notions in Hebrew and English in a series of experiments. He came to conclusion that the two concepts are not necessarily parallel dimensions; rather, they are believed to be different from each other.

Also, Brown and Levinson's (1978) two notion of negative and positive politeness can somehow be related to this discussion. As Eslamirasekh (1993) mentioned, when interpreting a linguistic behavior, the social meanings implied by these behaviors should also be considered. The members of two cultures may not necessarily consider the directness and indirectness similarly. Although indirectness and politeness are usually connected, their social meaning may be different in different cultures. According to Brown and Levinson (1978), negative politeness is indicated by using verbal strategies, which show deference and by avoiding imposition. However, positive politeness is achieved by indicating solidarity with the audience. Speakers show this kind of politeness by using direct requests among other strategies. Eslamirasekh (1993) referred to some researchers who have claimed that in Western world, politeness is usually expressed by negative strategies. According to results of the current study, Persian speakers used more direct strategies, that is, they tend to use positive politeness, a view that is supported by the findings of Eslamirasekh (1993) when she reasoned that in cultures such as Iranian culture, "acknowledgment of one's status as a member of the group has greater importance in determining norms of interaction than considerations of individual freedom" (p. 97). So, there is a tendency in NPSs to use positive politeness strategies more than negative ones.

According to the results of the study, NESs used mood derivable as their most frequently strategy, too. This finding

is in contrast with the results of Eslamirasekh (1993), Jalilifar (2009), and Yang (2009), in all of which, English speakers used conventionally indirect requests more frequently.

There are some reasons considered by the researchers of this study for these oppositions. First of all, in this study, the frequency of request strategies used in everyday conversations was investigated. In our everyday conversations, most of our requests are addressed to our friends or family members with whom we do not feel the necessity of decreasing the impact of our requests as much as when we communicate with strangers or interlocutors who are in the position of power. Furthermore, most of our daily requests are for small tasks in which the degree of imposition is low, and as a result, it does not necessitate the requestor to attempt to mitigate them.

Second, in most of the previous studies, the tool for eliciting the data has been DCT or its modified form (open questionnaire in Eslamirasekh, 1993) whose reliability has constantly been questioned by some researchers. As Nurani (2009) mentioned, "What people claim they would say in the hypothetical situation is not necessarily what they actually say in real situations" (p. 667). As the current study used authentic data gathered from the requests uttered in TV series, and as the conversations in TV series have been proved to resemble the authentic conversations (Fernandez-Guerra, 2008), the data gathered from this study might be a better representative of authentic conversations. Of course, it is necessary to mention here that the researchers do not claim that the results can be generalized to all conditions and situations in different contexts.

However, NESs used conventionally indirect level more with a higher frequency than NPSs did. This might be due to the fact that Western cultures are under the construct of individualism, which gives all human beings the right to think and judge independently, and so it is associated with the concept of autonomy (Brandon, 1994). As so, speakers of these languages use strategies related to negative politeness, which tends to indicate deference and gives special importance to other people's time and concerns, and it includes strategies such as indirect requests among others (Belza, 2008).

With regard to mitigation devices, according to the results, the English speakers in the English TV series used these devices to decrease the imposition of the requests more than the Persian speakers. They preferred internal mitigation devices to external ones. Because, in this study, the requests addressed to interlocutors with the same social position is investigated, it can be inferred that American English speakers mitigate their requests when they are addressing their friends and family members more than speakers, which is again another evidence for the importance they give for others' autonomy and the employment of the negative politeness strategies, whereas

for speakers, the expression of closeness and affiliation is more important than considering others' autonomy. This result is in contrast with Eslamirasekh (1993) who believes that speakers use more supportive moves (external modifiers) and internal modifiers to compensate for their indirectness. The reason of this contradiction might be the fact that in the mentioned study, there were some situations in which the speakers addressed the requests to interlocutors in higher social position. Furthermore, as mentioned before, the tool of eliciting data was different.

Implications of the Study

The finding of the current study can indicate a number of implications for Persian and English teachers in all educational setting, such as schools, institutes, and universities, in recognizing the strategies used by native Persian and English speakers in authentic conditions and teaching them to Persian and English language learners to enhance their pragmatic knowledge. As Politzer (1980) stated, pragmatic competence is not created automatically; rather, it requires education, starting from the first stages of language learning. Generally

speaking, the findings may positively contribute to the realm of teaching pragmatics to language learners. The results can also be beneficial for Persian and English learners, who can avoid communication breakdowns by having familiarity with the appropriate request strategies that NPSs and NESs use in different contexts. According to Schmidt (1995), acquisition must be with awareness and "learning requires awareness at the time of learning" (p. 26). EFL and ESL learners must be more alert of the differences between their native language and the target language and exercise more precautions when using this FTA. Furthermore, researchers who look for universal principles in different languages can use the results of this study to compare them with similar researches to find out to what extent the aspects that govern the appropriate use of SAs in different languages vary from culture to culture. Speech Acts (SA) Last but not least, educational policy makers, who are responsible for making decisions about educational system, can use the results of this study and similar studies to bring significant changes in the practices of teaching and learning Persian and English languages by incorporating strategies that improve the learner's pragmatic awareness and lead to more authenticity.

Appendix A

A Combination of Levels of Directness and Strategy Types.

Directness level	Strategy types	Examples
Direct	1. <i>Mood derivable</i> : where the grammatical mood of the verb determines its illocutionary force as a request, e.g., the imperative.	<i>Close the door.</i>
	2. <i>Explicit performatives</i> : where the illocutionary intent of the utterance is explicitly named.	<i>I'm asking you to close the door</i>
	3. <i>Hedged performatives</i> : where the naming of the illocutionary force is modified by hedging expressions.	<i>I would like to ask you to close the door.</i> <i>I must ask you to close the door.</i>
	4. <i>Obligation statements</i> : where the illocutionary point is directly derivable from the semantic meaning of the locution.	<i>You should/will have to close the door.</i>
	5. <i>Want statements</i> : where the utterance expresses S's desire, intention that H carries out the act.	<i>I want you to close the door.</i>
Conventionally indirect	6. <i>Suggestory formulae</i> : where the utterance contains a suggestion to do.	<i>Why don't you close the door?</i>
	7. <i>Query preparatory</i> : where the utterance contains reference to a preparatory condition (e.g., ability, willingness or possibility to perform the act) as conventionalized in any specific language.	<i>Could you close the door, please?</i> <i>Would you mind closing the door please?</i>
Non-conventionally indirect	8. <i>Strong hint</i> : where the utterance contains partial reference to object or elements needed to implement the act.	<i>The door is open</i>
	9. <i>Mild hint</i> : where no reference is made to the request proper (or any of its elements) but interpretation is possible from the context.	<i>There is a draught in here.</i>

Source. Taken from Belza (2008, p. 84).

Appendix B

Some Examples of Request Strategies Transcribed in English and Persian TV Series.

Strategy types	Persian	English
Mood derivable	Sabr kon ta xodam behet begam che kar koni. (Wait for me to tell you what to do)	Stop stalling and go.
Explicit performative	Khahesh mikonam ye kam arum sho. (I beg you to calm down a little).	I'd really appreciate it if you said something.
Hedged performative	Majburam azat bekham ke hameye harfhai ke zadim pishе xodemun bemune. (I have to ask you to keep it as a secret between us).	I'm gonna want you to be home by eleven.
Obligation statements	Bayad bery. (You must go)	You should slow things down.
Want statement	Mixam dige tu zendegim nabashi. (I don't want you in my life anymore)	We need you to do something for us.
Suggestory formula	Bia sa'ay konim be in mas'ale adat konim. (Let's try to get used to it)	Why wouldn't you just drop me off and go home.
Reference to preparatory condition	Mitunm karte shoma ro dashte basham? (Can I have your card?)	Can I store some odds and ends in your garage?
Strong hints	Un nabayad zende bemune. (He shouldn't be alive)	I kicked my ball in your back yard.

Appendix C

Some Examples of External and Internal Modification Devices Transcribed in English and Persian TV Series.

Modifications	Subcategories	Persian	English
Internal modification	Interrogatives	Momkene esme maleke inja ro be man begin? (Can you tell me the name of the landlord?)	Would you girls come and help me with the snacks?
	Embedded if clause	Age negah darid, man piade misham. (If you stop, I will get out of the car.)	I would appreciate it if you keep it to yourself.
	Understaters	Ye kam dar morede harfam fekr kon. (Think a little about what I told you.)	Give me a sec to let the office wear off.
	Time intensifiers	Behtare zudtar jam o jur koni. (You'd better tidy up immediately.)	Gabby, come back here right now.
External modification	Grounders	Be vida hichi nagu. Nemikham fek kone doroughgu hastam. (Don't say anything to Vida. I don't want her to think I am a liar.)	If you could stop by the marker. I am out of sugar.
	Getting a pre-commitment	Mishe ye khasheshi azatun bokonam? Mikham behesh ye telefon bezanam. (Can I ask for a favor? I need to call her.)	There is something else nice that I'd like you to do. Can you recommend Porter and Preston.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article.

References

- Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Bachman, L. (1990). *Fundamental considerations in language testing*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Bachman, L. F., & Palmer, A. S. (1996). *Language testing in practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Belza, A. (2008). *A questionnaire-based comparative study of Irish English and Polish speech act of requesting* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Faculty of Philosophy of Silesia, Katowice, Poland.
- Blum-Kulka, S. (1987). Indirectness and politeness in requests: Same or different? *Journal of Pragmatics*, *11*, 145-160.
- Blum-Kulka, S., House, J., & Kasper, G. (1989). *Cross-cultural pragmatics: Requests and apologies*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Blum-Kulka, S., & Olshtain, E. (1984). Requests and apologies: A cross-cultural study of speech act realization patterns (CCSARP). *Applied Linguistics*, *5*, 196-214.
- Branden, N. (1994). *Honoring the self: The psychology of confidence and respect*. New York, NY: Bantam.

- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1978). Universals in language usage: Politeness phenomena. In E. N. Goody (Ed.), *Questions and politeness: Strategies in social interaction* (pp. 256-289). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*, 1, 1-47.
- Chen, S. C., & Chen, S. H. (2007). Interlanguage requests: A cross-cultural study of English and Chinese. *The Linguistic Journal*, 2(2), 33-52.
- Edmonson, W. (1981). Spoken discourse. *A model for analysis*. London: Longman.
- Edmonson, W., & House, G. (1981). Politeness markers in English and German. In F. Coulmas (Ed.), *Conversational routines: Explorations in standardized communication situations and prepatterned speech* (pp. 157-185). The Hague, The Netherlands: Mouton Publishers.
- Ellis, R. (1994). *The study of second language acquisition*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Eslamirasekh, Z. (1993). A cross-cultural comparison of requestive speech act realization patterns in Persian and American English. *Pragmatics and Language Learning Monograph Series*, 4, 85-103.
- Farahian, M., Rezaee, M., & Gholami, A. (2012). Does direct instruction develop pragmatic competence? Teaching refusals to EFL learners of English. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 3, 814-821.
- Felix-Brasdefer, J. C. (2005). Indirectness and politeness in Mexican requests. In D. Eddington (Chair), *Selected proceedings of the 7th Hispanic Linguistic Symposium*. Cascadilla Proceeding Project, Somerville, MA.
- Fernandez-Guerra, A. (2008). Requests in TV series and in naturally occurring discourse: A comparison. In E. Alcon (Ed.), *Learning how to request in an instructed language learning context* (pp. 11-126). Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang.
- Goffman, E. (1967). *Interaction ritual: Essays on face to face behavior*. New York, NY: Anchor Books.
- Goffman, E. (2006). On facework: An analysis of ritual elements in social interaction. In A. Jaworski & N. Coupland (Eds.), *The discourse reader* (pp. 299-310). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Hans, X. (2012). A contrastive study of Chinese and British English request modifications. *Theory and Practice in Language studies*, 2, 1905-1910.
- Hilbig, I. (2009). *Request strategies and politeness in Lithuanian and British English*. Available from www.ifa.amu.edu.pl/ylmp
- Jalilifar, A. (2009). Request strategies: Cross-sectional study of Iranian EFL learners and Australian native speakers. *English Language Teaching*, 2(1), 46-61.
- Kiok, D. (1995). Transfer of pragmatic competence and suggestions in Spanish foreign language learning. In S. Gass & J. Neu (Eds.), *Speech acts across cultures* (pp. 257-281). Berlin, Germany: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Leech, G. (1983). *Principles of politeness*. London, England: Longman.
- Memarian, P. (2012). *The use of request strategies in English by Iranian graduate students: A case study* (Unpublished master's thesis). Eastern Mediterranean University, Gazimağusa, North Cyprus.
- Nurani, L. M. (2009). Methodological issues in pragmatic research: Is discourse completion test a reliable data collection instrument? *Jurnal Socioteknologi Edisi*, 17, 667-678.
- Parker, F., & Riley, K. (1994). *Linguistics for non-linguists*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education.
- Politzer, R. L. (1980). Requesting in elementary school classrooms. *TESOL Quarterly*, 14, 165-174.
- Rue, Y. J., Zhang, G., & Shin, K. (2007). Request strategies in Korean. In *5th Biennial Korean Studies Association of Australian Conference* (pp. 112-119). Perth, Australia.
- Salmani, M. A. (2008). Persian requests: Redress of face through indirectness. *Iranian Journal of Language Studies*, 2, 257-280.
- Schmidt, R. (1995). Consciousness and foreign language learning: A tutorial on the role of attention and awareness in learning. In R. Schmidt (Ed.), *Attention & awareness in foreign language learning* (pp. 1-63). Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Searle, J. R. (1969). *Speech Acts: An essay in the philosophy of language*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Searle, J. R. (1975). A taxonomy of illocutionary acts. In K. Gunderson (Ed.), *Language, mind, and knowledge* (pp. 344-369). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Shams, R., & Afghari, A. (2011). Effects of culture and gender in comprehension of speech acts of indirect requests. *English Language Teaching*, 4, 279-287.
- Tatton, H. (2008). "Could you, perhaps, pretty please?" Request directness in cross-cultural speech act realization. Working Papers in TESOL and Applied Linguistics, 8(2), 1-4.
- Tawalbeh, A., & Al-Oqaily, E. (2012). In-directness and politeness in American English and Saudi Arabic requests: A cross-cultural comparison. *Asian Social Science*, 8(10), 85-98.
- Thomas, D. (1983). *An invitation to grammar*. Bangkok, Thailand: Summer Institute of Linguistics, Mahidol University.
- Umar, A. M. (2004). Request strategies as used by advanced Arab learners of English as a foreign language. *Zul-Qu'da* 1424-H, 16(1), 42-87.
- Vahid Dastjerdi, H., & Rezvani, E. (2010). The impact of instruction on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' production of requests in English. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 1, 782-790.
- Wannaruk, A. (2008). Pragmatic transfer in Thai EFL refusals. *RELJ Journal*, 39, 318-337.
- Wolfson, N. (1989). *Perspectives: Sociolinguistics and TESOL*. Rowley, MA: Newbury.
- Xiao-le, G. (2011). The effect of explicit and implicit instructions of request strategies. *International Communication Studies*, 1, 104-123.
- Yang, L. (2009). *The speech act of request: A comparative study of Chinese and American graduate students at an American university* (Master's thesis). Graduate College of Bowling Green State University, OH.
- Yule, G. (1996). *Pragmatics*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Author Biographies

Shiler Yazdanfar has earned her MA degree in English language Teaching from Urmia Azad University, Urmia, Iran. She is presently teaching English at Iran Language Institute (ILI) Urmia Branch.

Alireza Bonyadi earned his PhD in Teaching English as a Second Language from faculty of education university of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Presently, Dr. Bonyadi is the General Director of Research and Innovation and senior lecturer at Islamic Azad University (IAU), Urmia, Iran. He has published numerous research papers in scholarly journals.