



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***THE PRAGMATIC DEVELOPMENT OF IRANIAN ENGLISH LEARNERS
ACROSS PROFICIENCY LEVELS IN THE PERFORMANCE OF THE
REQUESTIVE SPEECH ACT***

SHAHLAAMOALIAKBARI NAJAFABADI

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SHAHLA AMOOLIAKBARI NAJAFABADI

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

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By

SHAHLA AMOOLIAKBARI NAJAFABADI

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

April 2013

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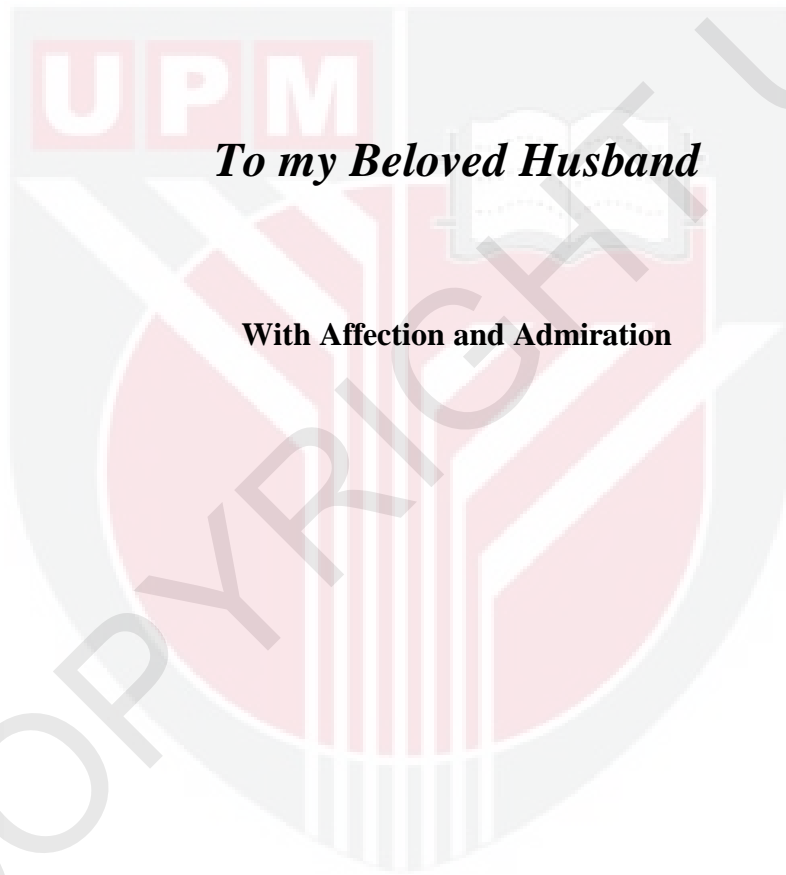
Dedicated

To my beloved mother and father

both of whom helped me in ways they may never understand

To my Beloved Husband

With Affection and Admiration



Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

**THE PRAGMATIC DEVELOPMENT OF IRANIAN ENGLISH LEARNERS
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SHAHLAAMOOLIAKBARI NAJAFABADI

April 2013

Chairman: Associate Professor Shamala Paramasivam, PhD

Faculty: Modern Languages and Communication

The present study investigated the interlanguage pragmatic knowledge of Iranian English learners at three levels of English language proficiency. The study focused on learners' ability to perform the speech act of request in different social situations, and their performance was compared with American native speakers of English to see to what extent they approximated native speakers in performing different requestive features as direct and conventionally indirect strategies, external and internal modifications, and alerters. A Discourse Completion Task (DCT) was employed to elicit performance data from 120 participants, 90 Iranian language learners of English and 30 American native speakers of English. The DCT included 12 situations in which each situation was based on the variation of two social power and distance variables providing six different social situations. The data were categorized using an adapted version of the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) classification.

The study found that Iranian English learners used more direct strategies and fewer conventionally indirect strategies than native speakers, but with higher levels of proficiency the learners moved in the direction of the native speaker norms, that is, they used fewer direct strategies and more conventionally indirect strategies.

It was found that Iranian English learners used more external modifications than native speakers; however, they showed development in the direction of native speakers as their proficiency level increased. Language learners used less internal modifications than native speakers; however, they showed development in the direction of the native speakers as their proficiency level increased. It was also found that language learners used more alerters compared to native speakers; however, the use of alerters used by language learners reduced by increase in language proficiency level.

As a whole the study showed that with increase in language proficiency level Iranian language learners showed pragmatic development in using the requestive speech act. In addition, Iranian pragmatic competence in using requests in English approximated native speakers' norms of use with regard to the use of conventionally indirect strategy and external modifications in higher level of language proficiency. However, they did not approximate native norms with regard to the use of direct strategy, internal modifications, and alerters.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**PERKEMBANGAN PRAGMATIK TAHAP PENGUASAAN BAHASA
INGGERIS BAGI PELAJAR IRAN DALAM PRESTASI PERTUTURAN
RESQUESTIVE SPEECH ACT**

Oleh

SHAHLA AMOOALIAKBARI NAJAFABADI

April 2013

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Kajian ini untuk mengenal pasti pragmatik pengetahuan kebahasaan pelajar Iran mempelajari bahasa Inggeris pada tiga tahap kecekapan. Tumpuan kajian ini ialah keupayaan pelajar untuk melaksanakan ujaran kehendak bahasa dalam situasi sosial yang berbeza, dan prestasi kebahasaan mereka dibandingkan dengan penutur asli bahasa Inggeris Amerika untuk melihat sejauh mana persamaan kebahasaan terhadap penutur asli dalam melaksanakan ciri-ciri kebahasaan yang berbeza seperti strategi konvensional langsung dan tidak langsung, pengubahsuaian dalaman dan luaran serta kesediaan. Satu tugas wacana (DCT) dibina dan digunakan untuk mendapatkan data prestasi terhadap 120 peserta, 90 pelajar Iran yang mempelajari Bahasa Inggeris dan 30 penutur asli bahasa Inggeris Amerika. DCT termasuk 12 situasi, dan setiap situasi berdasarkan varian kuasa dua daya sosial dan jarak pembolehkan yang menyediakan enam situasi sosial yang berbeza. Data dikategori menggunakan versi

yang disesuaikan daripada *Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project* (CCSARP)

Kajian mendapati bahawa pelajar Iran yang mempelajari bahasa Inggeris lebih menggunakan strategi langsung dan sedikit sahaja menggunakan strategi konvensional tidak langsung berbanding dengan penutur asli, tetapi pada tahap yang lebih tinggi penguasaan pelajar berubah kepada norma penutur asli. Ini menunjukkan sangat sedikit menggunakan strategi langsung tetapi lebih kepada penggunaan strategi konvensional tidak langsung.

Kajian ini juga mendapati bahawa pelajar Iran yang belajar bahasa Inggeris lebih banyak menggunakan pengubahsuaian luaran berbanding dengan penutur asli, walau bagaimanapun, mereka memperlihatkan perkembangan ke arah penutur asli sebagai peningkatan tahap kecekapan mereka. Pelajar bahasa kurang membuat pengubahsuaian dalaman berbanding dengan penutur asli; bagaimanapun mereka memperlihatkan perkembangan ke arah penutur asli sebagai tahap kemahiran berbahasa. Kajian ini juga mendapati bahawa pelajar bahasa lebih berhati-hati berbanding dengan penutur asli; tetapi sikap berhati-hati itu beransur kurang apabila tahap kemahiran bahasa mereka meningkat.

Secara keseluruhannya kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa terdapat peningkatan dalam tahap penguasaan bahasa bagi pelajar Iran dan memperlihatkan perkembangan pragmatik dalam menggunakan *requestive speech*. Di samping itu, perkembangan kecekapan pragmatik pelajar Iran seperti yang diperlukan dalam bahasa Inggeris hampir menyamai norma penutur asli dengan menggunakan strategi konvensional

tidak langsung dan sedikit pengubahsuaian luaran pada peringkat yang lebih tinggi kemahiran bahasa. Walau bagaimanapun, mereka tidak dapat menyamai norma asli dengan menggunakan strategi langsung, dan pengubahsuaian dalaman.



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I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my beloved mother, my supportive father, my husband and my brother who are always there for me. This thesis would not have been possible without their love and understanding. I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents, for their patience, unconditional love and generosity during my whole life. My special thanks to all my friends for their impressive help in my thesis. My sincere thanks to all the participants for providing valuable feedback in this study.

Finally, thanks God for giving me another opportunity to know myself by living in Malaysia.

Approval

I certify that an Examination Committee has met on 24-4-2013 to conduct the final examination of Shahla Amooaliakbari Najafabadi on her thesis entitled “The Pragmatic Development of Iranian English Learners across Proficiency Levels in the Performance of the Requestive Speech Act” in accordance with the Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Act 1980 and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Regulations 1981. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the relevant degree for Doctor of Philosophy.

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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis is my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any other degree at Universiti Putra Malaysia or other institutions.

SHAHLA AMOOALIAKBARI NAJAFABADI

Date: 24 April 2013

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CCSARP	Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project
CP	Cooperative Principle
DCT	Discourse Completion Task
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	English as a Second Language
ILP	Interlanguage Pragmatics
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
NS	Native Speaker
NNS	Non Native Speaker
SPSS	Statistical Package of Social Science
X ²	Chi-square

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Languages considerably affect people's personal relations. Appropriate communication is of vital importance in our interactions with others and in establishing relationships. Kasper and Rose (2003) believe that there are many challenges when people communicate within the same cultural and linguistic community, but communicating across cultures brings far more challenges and problems.

The situation where learners become proficient in the syntax, vocabulary, and phonology of the language but fail to communicate pragmatically is a familiar occurrence in any foreign language classrooms. The present study seeks to explore the pragmatic competence of Iranian learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) at different levels of the language proficiency when making requests in English compared to American English native speakers (NSs) to see how far Iranian learners' realization of requestive speech act deviates from target language norms. Additionally, it tries to find out the effect of social power and social distance on the choice of request strategies by the language learners compared to that of NSs of English.

The main reason for doing this research is that the population of EFL learners is considerable in Iran and a majority of this population learns English for going to English speaking countries to study and work. Since what is polite in one language and culture maybe impolite or rude in other language communities and cultures, the knowledge of English pragmatics is important for Iranian EFL learners; they need to be able to apply language functions in the target language in order to be successful in their communications.

When learners of a second and foreign language attempt to communicate with NSs, errors in their speech may badly affect the communication by interfering with the clarity of their message; however, pragmatic errors, that is, when learners produce a message that conveys either less or more than their intended meaning, may pose more potential harm to communication than linguistic errors. Pragmatic errors may not only hamper a second language learner's ability to express a particular message, they may also cause a NS to form mistaken perceptions about the personal character, beliefs and attitudes of the learner (Achiba, 2003). Cultural values, such as respect for self and others, status based on age, rank, power, and assumptions about self-reliance and independence may not always be reflected in grammatical and lexical forms but they almost always are projected in the pragmatics of the communication (Kasper, 1996). In order to prevent potential mishap in cross-cultural communication and to be successful in their interactions with the members of the target language, second and foreign language learners must not only improve their overall language proficiency and accuracy in a language, but also develop their pragmatic competence in the language they are learning and become communicatively competent.

Therefore, second and foreign language learning involves both linguistic and pragmatic competence (Kasper and Rose, 2002).

1.2 Problem Statement

Second language learning involves more than the acquisition of lexical, phonological, and syntactic knowledge of the target language. It also requires learning the pragmatic rules of the language in order to use the language in a native-like manner. Olshtain and Blum-Kulka (1985) mention that a competent second language learner should acquire socio-cultural rules appropriately as well as grammatical competence. They pointed out that communication failure may still happen when proficient L2 learners do not have sufficient socio-cultural knowledge.

Since the introduction of the concept of communicative competence, researchers are increasingly recognizing the importance of pragmatic aspects in second language learning and focusing on ILP studies. The results of some studies focusing on ILP have observed that second/foreign language (L2) learners show an L2 pragmatic system which is very different from that of the target language (TL) NSs both in the production and comprehension (Bardovi- Harlig, 2001; Kasper, 1997). Although many ILP studies have been done over the past two decades, the majority of these studies were not ILP developmental studies but were instead studies of performance. As many researchers have noted, what is lacking in these ILP studies are data on the learners' interlanguage development over time (Kasper, 1989, 1996; Kasper and Schmidt, 1996; Rose, 2000). Bardovi-Harlig (1999) also suggests that studies

focusing on the development of interlanguage pragmatics are needed in that such studies can connect ILP studies, which have mainly dealt with performance studies, and SLA studies, which have focused on the process of second language acquisition.

Existing ILP developmental studies have focused on the relationship between L2 learners' pragmatic performance of a particular speech act and L2 proficiency. Some studies such as those conducted by Cohen and Olshtain (1981), Takahashi and Beebe (1987), Trosborg (1995), Hill (1997), Rose (2000), Churchill (2001), Pérez i Parent (2002), Kobayashi and Rinnert (2003), Hassall (2003), Holtman (2005), Pellet (2005), and Taguchi (2006) all of which are discussed in chapter 2, show that there is a positive relationship between L2 proficiency and progress of L2 pragmatic competence. On the other hand, the result of other studies reveal that L2 proficiency can be a vital indicator for second language pragmatic competence, but a high level of language proficiency does not assure a high level of pragmatic competence (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1986; Eisenstein and Bodman, 1993; Suh, 1999; Taguchi, 2002; Shardakova, 2005, and Farnia, 2009, all are discussed in chapter 2, section 2.4.1). An analysis of those reviewed ILP studies shows that ILP researchers have only examined second and foreign language learners from a limited number of linguistic and cultural backgrounds such as English, Danish, Hebrew, French, German, Japanese, Spanish, Chinese, and Korean. Therefore, it is necessary to expand the scope of ILP research to cover the study of more languages and cultures to fill the gap in ILP literature, studying Iranian EFL/ESL learners will add useful data to the literature.

As it was previously mentioned, one of the major concerns in interlanguage pragmatics is the study of perception of speech acts. Interlanguage pragmatics according to Kasper and Dahl (1991) investigates NNSs' comprehension and the production of speech acts and how their L2 knowledge in speech acts is acquired. Moreover, Kasper and Schmidt (1996) mention that perception of speech acts, as opposed to the production, is an aspect of L2 learning and teaching which has not received adequate empirical attention.

Appropriate requests are among one of more important speech acts; they occur very frequently in everyday encounters. The inappropriate use of the request act by non-native learners of language can serve to make them look rude or impolite. In some cases, communication breakdown can occur. It is also widely believed that NSs consider pragmatic errors to be more serious than phonological or syntactic errors (Koike, 1995; Thomas, 1983; Wolfson, 1989). As Blum-Kulka (1991) pointed out, requesting style is a good index of a cultural way of speaking.

Requests are an interesting speech act to investigate because they are very frequently performed in our daily life and request forms and functions are often explicit (Kumatoridani, 1995). Request has been one of the speech acts most widely studied in a variety of first languages (L1) and second languages (L2). Based on Pinto et al., (2007) this wealth of research is largely due to the fact that requests entail the speaker (S) imposing on the hearer (H) by requesting that a certain action be carried out for S's benefit. Given this element of imposition, a successful request requires some degree of linguistic tact that often varies across languages, thus the transfer of

strategies from one language to another may result in inappropriate or nonconventional speech. However, in order to appropriately make requests and also perceive the illocutionary force of an utterance as a request, learners have to acquire sociopragmatic knowledge such as the relative degree of imposition of a speech act in the target culture, and pragmatic-linguistic knowledge such as the degree of politeness of utterances in L2 to avoid being considered as rude or impolite by NSs (Kasper, 1996).

Bergman and Kasper (1993), Blum-Kulka and House (1989), Brown and Levinson (1987), Kasper and Dahl (1991), Mir (1995), Olshtain (1989), and Shimamura (1993) mention that social variables such as right, obligation, social distance, social power, and gender are an area of cross-cultural difference that may influence speech act production. Hence, it is crucial to find how language learners of different cultures recognize these social variables and how this knowledge is revealed in their production.

In the past decade, a considerable body of research has emerged describing speech act performance by Iranian NSs; these studies have focused on production or comprehension of various speech acts such as requests (Eslami-Rasekh, 1993; Akbari, 1995; Taghizade, 2004; Ahangar, 2005, Hedayat, 2005, Amooaliakbari, 2007; Salmani-Nodoushan, 2008; Eslami-Rasekh et al., 2010), offers and expressions of thanks (Koutlaki, 2002), apologies (Eslami-Rasekh, 2004; Taghizade, 2004; Ahangar, 2005; Afghari, 2007), invitations (Ahangar, 2005; Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; Salmani-Nodoushan, 2006), suggestions (Pakzad, 2006, Moin, 2007), gripping

(Allami, 2006), complaints (Eslami-Rasekh, 2004; Pakzad, 2006, Salmani-Nodoushan, 2006), and condolence (Lotfollahi and Eslami-Rasekh, 2011). In addition, some studies as Yarmohammadi's (2003) work on complaints, favor-asking, and griping; Farina's (2009), Phishghadam and Zarei's (2011) work on expressing gratitude; Keshavarz et al.'s (2006), Moradkhani and Feyzi's (2008), Sadeghi and Savojbolaghchilar's (2011), Allami and Naeimi 's (2011), Sahragard and Javanmard's (2011) work on refusals; Sharifian's (2009) work on compliment; and Jalili's (2009) work on requests have investigated speech act performance by Iranian EFL learners.

The population of Iranian learners is considerable and a majority of this population learns English to immigrate and work in English speaking countries. Since English is learned as a foreign language in Iran and as English is not the first language of the teachers teaching English, more research on Iranian EFL learners' ILP is needed to identify their problems and provide solutions to the pragmatic challenges faced by them.

In spite of (1) the importance of interlanguage pragmatic knowledge of the second and foreign language, (2) the importance of speech acts as part of the development of communicative competence particularly the requestive speech act, and (3) the increase in the number of Iranian EFL learners immigration to English speaking countries for living and working, there is a scarcity of research on speech acts and interlanguage pragmatics of Iranian EFL learners. In response to this problem, this study focuses on the production of the requestive speech act by Iranian EFL learners

at different levels of language proficiency to determine the relationship between foreign language grammatical and pragmatic competence in Iranian EFL learners. Specifically, this study investigates the directness level of strategies and use of supportive moves in making requests by Iranian EFL learners. In addition, this study tries to determine to what extent Iranian EFL learners' pragmatic performance approximates and differs from NSs' performance. As mentioned earlier, language pragmatic differences can cause communication breakdowns; therefore, second and foreign language learners should gain target language pragmatic knowledge to be successful in their communications with target language NSs. Consequently knowing pragmatic knowledge of Iranian EFL learners in comparison with English NSs is essential.

1.3 Research Objectives

The main aim of this research is to examine the Iranian EFL learners' pragmatic knowledge with regard to the request features at different levels of language proficiency. It also tries to determine to what extent learners' pragmatic performance approximate NSs performance. In addition, the effect of social power and distance on the choice of strategies is a concern of this study. More specifically the objectives of this research are as follows:

1. To identify the request features of Iranian English learners' interlanguage when performing the requestive speech act.

2. To find out if the request features of Iranian English Learners' interlanguage when performing the requestive speech act approximates NSs norms, and how.
3. To find out how second language proficiency level influences Iranian learners request features.
4. To find out how social power and social distance influence Iranian learners request features.

1.4 Research Questions

Based on the objectives, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the requestive features of Iranian English learners' interlanguage when performing requestive speech act?
2. Do the requestive features of the Iranian English learners approximate NS norms? How?
3. How does second language proficiency level affect Iranian learners' request features?

4. How does social power and social distance affect Iranian learners' request features?

1.5 Theoretical Foundation

The main research objective within the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) during its forty-year-long history has been the investigation of how people learn a second language and how their L2 competence and abilities develop in the process of learning. In the field of SLA, researchers mainly concentrated on how language learners acquire the linguistic forms of the second language. However, in the field of SLA, the results of many works showed that there were situations where language learners become proficient in the syntax, vocabulary, and phonology of the language but fail to communicate pragmatically in the second language. In accordance to this failure in learning second language, SLA researchers emphasized the importance of acquiring pragmatic competence as well as linguistic competence for second language learners for successful communication in a second language. (Ellis, 1994).

Recently, the study of the acquisition of pragmatic competence in second language (L2) has received considerable attention by second language acquisition researchers.

Pragmatic competence consists of the knowledge that speakers and listeners use in order to engage in communication. One aspect of L2 pragmatics examines how learners attempt to perform and comprehend specific interpersonal communicative functions such as speech acts in context. Since communicative functions tend to be culture-specific, learners of a second language must acquire all the requisite

components of phonology, morphology, vocabulary, and grammar to produce a comprehensible speech act. At the same time, learners must adjust to differing social norms for expressing them, thus demonstrating their pragmatic competence in the language. In some cases, NSs may not interpret a speech act made by a non-native speaker (NNS) as an intended speech act at all because some learners are accustomed to using their native language speech act strategies in the target language that are inappropriate in the target language. In these cases, the lack of pragmatic competence in the target language can cause second and foreign language speakers to send and receive wrong messages when communicating with NSs of the target language, with the consequence of being perceived as rude and impolite, and resulting in harm to social relations.

In second language acquisition, pragmatic competence has been identified as an important component of communicative language ability (Bachman, 1990). Working in the field of pragmatics makes it necessary to have a look at pragmatics and its interrelated areas such as pragmatic competence and interlanguage pragmatics.

1.5.1 Pragmatics

Pragmatics is the study of communication as a socially-situated exchange among interlocutors. Utterance meaning is the result of a speaker-hearer interaction occurring within a specific social context and co-text. Andersen (2001) states that pragmatics distinguishes between propositional meaning and contextual meaning. Based on Andersen (2001) contextual meaning is the meaning associated with the

forms and crucially depends on the context of use and is generally external to the propositional meaning of the utterances that contain them. An essential goal of pragmatics is to account for how the hearer arrives (seemingly effortlessly) at a correct interpretation of the message so that the exchange between speaker and hearer is both successful and efficient. Definitions of pragmatics centre on those aspects of communication which are contextually determined (Anderson, 2001; Kasper, 1992) with a focus on speaker meaning and utterance interpretation (Thomas, 1995). Pragmatics tries to answer such questions as who speaks what to whom, when, where, why, and how language is used, as well as, how language is interpreted by the hearers. The five areas usually covered in the study of pragmatics are deixis, conversational implicatures, presupposition, speech acts, and conversational structure (Levinson, 1983).

1.5.2 Communicative Competence and Pragmatic Competence

Pragmatic competence is born from a series of models of communicative competence, first developed by Hymes (1972) in reaction to Chomsky's performance/competence model, as the ability to form correct and appropriate sentences. Chomsky (1965) defined his notion of competence as the knowledge of a language while Hymes (1962, 1972)'s concept of communicative competence was the knowledge of a language and the ability to apply that knowledge.

Communicative competence was proposed by Hymes (1972) to address the other aspects of competence that a learner needs to have in addition to grammatical and

linguistic competence. Hymes (1972) believed that there are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless (p. 278). From his perspective, the central concern of communicative competence is speech communities and the interaction between language and culture. Several models of communicative competence have been developed since its introduction. Canale and Swain's (1980) framework of communicative competence, Bachman's (1990) model of the language competence, and Celce-Murcia et al.,'s (1995) communicative competence model are the most important models of communicative competence.

Canale and Swain's (1980) theoretical framework of communicative competence is based on Hymes (1972)'s communicative competence. The communicative competence in their theory consists of four components: grammatical competence (the knowledge of vocabulary, pronunciation, syntax, etc.); sociolinguistic competence (the knowledge to use language appropriately according to the context); strategic competence (the use of communication strategies, both verbal and nonverbal); and discourse competence (the ability to employ cohesive devices to express one's thought coherently). In their theory, pragmatic competence is not mentioned as a distinct component of communicative competence, though it can be implied as a part of sociolinguistic competence.

Bachman (1990) introduced the model of language competence in which the notion of pragmatic competence is explicitly presented. He mentions that pragmatic competence is essential for the overall competence of a language learner. The

components of language competence proposed by Bachman (1990) are illustrated in the figure 1.1.

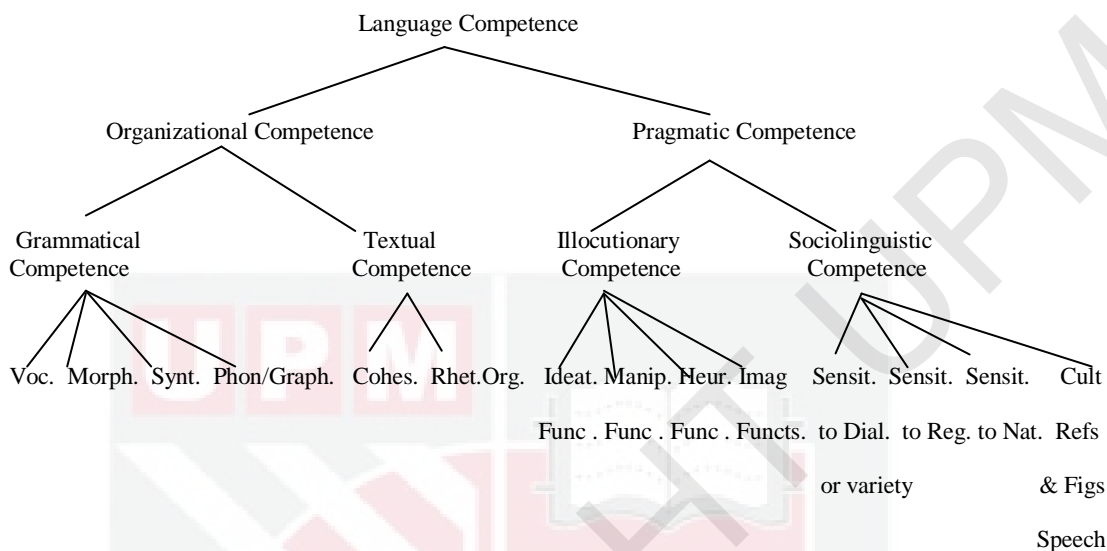


Figure 1.1. Bachman’s Model of Language Competence (1990, p. 87)

As shown, Bachman (1990) regarded language competence as “knowledge of language” (p. 85), which is similar to communicative competence under Canale and Swain’s (1980) framework. In a related vein, she reframed Canale and Swain’s discourse competence as textual competence.

Based on Bachman’s (1990) model, language learners should be equipped with at least two types of competence to be competent language users. Competence can be divided into organizational competence and pragmatic competence. To be organizationally competent, language learners need to have grammatical competence (knowledge of vocabulary, morphology, syntax, phonology, and graphology) and textual competence (ability to organize one’s speech cohesively and rhetorically). And to be pragmatically competent, language learners need to have illocutionary and

sociolinguistic competence. Having illocutionary competence means having the ability to manipulate the functions of a language. Bachman classifies illocutionary competence to four sub-categories as ideational functions (which is the ability to express one's ideas and feelings), manipulative functions (to get things done), heuristic functions (which is using language to carry out daily work such as teaching, learning, and problem solving), and imaginative functions (to be creative). Sociolinguistic competence refers to the sensitivity to dialect or variety, the sensitivity to register, the sensitivity to naturalness (i.e., native-like use of language), and the sensitivity to cultural referents and figures of speech.

Bachman's model (1990) of communicative competence considers the global language proficiency of a language learner. In his model pragmatic competence is seen as a compulsory constituent of the whole proficiency, without which one's language competence would be incomplete and an assessment of language proficiency would be inaccurate. In this light, Bachman's (1990) model advances Canale and Swain's (1980) framework in helping us understand further what communicative competence signifies and who should be considered a competent language user. Yet, like Canale and Swain's (1980) framework, Bachman's (1990) model does not indicate the correlations between the two key components (organizational and pragmatic competence) and their subcomponents. Celce-Murcia et al.,'s (1995) communicative competence model filled this gap.

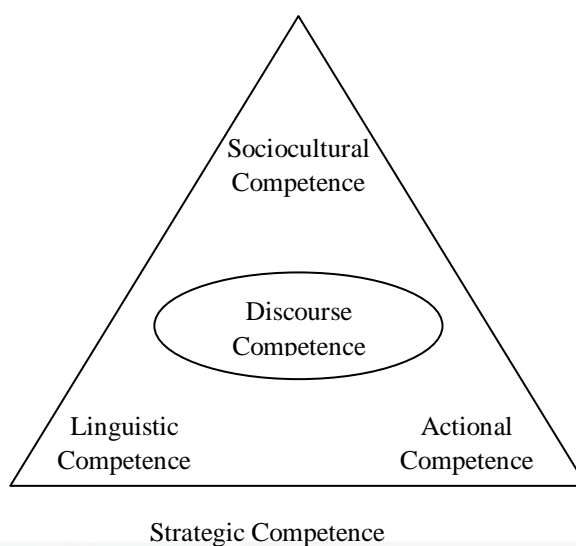


Figure 1.2. Celce-Murcia et al.,’s Model of Communicative Competence (1995, p.10)

In this model, communicative competence consists of five interrelated components including linguistic, actional, sociocultural, discourse, and strategic competence. Linguistic competence, in this model, in addition to the grammatical competence in Canale and Swain’s (1980, 1983) framework, also includes knowledge of the distinct layers of a linguistic system, such as sentence patterns, morphological inflections, lexis, phonological, and orthographic systems. The actional competence corresponds to Canale and Swain’s (1980, 1983) sociolinguistic competence and Bachman’s (1990) pragmatic competence, requiring the knowledge of language functions and speech act sets in interpreting and conveying a speaker’s intended meaning by means of linguistic conventions. The third component, sociocultural competence, is related to Canale and Swain’s (1980) sociolinguistic competence and Bachman’s (1990) sociolinguistic competence, addressing the ability to express one’s self appropriately according to the cultural and social conventions of the context. Discourse competence is the key component in Celce-Murcia et al.,’s (1995) model. As shown in Figure 1.2, it is closely associated with linguistic, actional, and sociocultural competence and it includes cohesion, deixis, coherence, genre structure, and

conversational structure. The four constituents of communicative competence described above (i.e., linguistic, actional, sociocultural, and discourse competence) in Celce-Murcia et al.,'s (1995) model are all subject to the last component, strategic competence. Celce-Murcia et al., (1995) framed strategic competence as the knowledge and use of communication strategies that include avoidance, achievement, time-gaining, self-monitoring, and interactional strategies. They believe that the five main components and their subcomponents should be employed not only to carry out communication, but also to improve the efficiency of communication.

Celce-Murcia et al.,'s (1995) model, different from the previous two, illustrates the incorporation of five components consisting communicative competence. Celce-Murcia et al.,'s (1995) further suggested that part of their model could be extended to include other strategies relating to L2 learning and teaching, calling for a further construction on communicative competence.

In addition to the exemplification of pragmatic competence as an integral part of communicative competence, the three models of communicative competence underpin the interdependency of grammatical and pragmatic competence, indicating that meaningful communication can only take place with the integration of all components. Lacking any kind of competence will result in communication breakdowns, issues that have received much exploration in interlanguage pragmatics. Hymes (1972) and Canale and Swain (1980,) argued that competence in an L2 is much more than mastering the grammatical codes. How language is used in the

community is also important. Bachman (1990) and Celce-Murcia et al., (1995) followed and added components and connections to Canale and Swain's (1980) notion of communicative competence.

Pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics are two main aspects of pragmatic competence emphasized by different scholars initially introduced by Leech (1983) and Thomas (1983). Thomas (1983) defines pragmalinguistics as the resources for conveying communicative acts and relational or interpersonal meanings and Leech (1983) states that sociopragmatics is the social perception underlying participants' interpretation and performance of communicative action.

However, Rose and Kasper (2001, p.2.) point out the dialectic unity of both components while stating that pragmatics is concerned with social behavior where specific linguistic choices have consequences in real life. Bardovi-Harlig (1999, p.686) explains that pragmalinguistic competence is the linguistic competence that allows speakers to carry out the speech acts that their sociopragmatic competence tells them are desirable. Most researchers agree that pragmatic competence includes the components of pragmatic performance (production) and metapragmatic awareness (Kasper and Dahl, 1991). Pragmatic performance is typically associated with learners' ability to produce pragmatically appropriate speech acts (or actions) in their L2 speaking and writing (Kasper and Rose, 2002). Metapragmatic awareness has been defined as knowledge of the social meaning of variable L2 forms and awareness of the ways in which these forms mark different aspects of social contexts (Kingtoner and Farrell, 2004). Typically, both performance and awareness are

considered important and interrelated aspects of L2 pragmatic competence (Kasper and Rose, 2002). Garcia (2004, p.16) states that pragmatic competence refers to a language user's ability to produce language for different purposes and to comprehend speaker intention. It also refers to a language user's knowledge of social rules of appropriacy and awareness of how utterances are linked together in coherent discourse.

As the above discussion shows, pragmatic competence is an essential part of communicative competence, and grammatical and pragmatic competence are interdependent; in this sense then meaningful communication can only take place with the integration of all competencies. Lacking any kind of competence can result in communication breakdown, an issue that is the concern of interlanguage pragmatics, which is discussed in the next section.

1.5.3 Interlanguage Pragmatics

Interlanguage, a term first used by Selinker (1972), refers to the continuum that L2 learners construct when they are learning the L2 grammar system on their way to the target language norms. In second language acquisition, interlanguage refers to a language system that is different and interdependent both from the language learner's L1 and the language to be learned (L2) (Ellis, 1985). This notion was then extended to interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) in the field of pragmatics by L2 researchers in their investigation of pragmatic knowledge of language learners in the target language.

Kasper (1992) introduces interlanguage pragmatics as the branch of second language research that studies how NNSs understand and carry out linguistic action in a target language, and how they acquire L2 pragmatic knowledge. Kasper (1992) later defines ILP as the study of NNSs' comprehension, production, and acquisition of linguistic action in L2. Kasper and Blum-Kulka (1993, p.3) have described ILP as a "second-generation hybrid" deriving from the two research traditions of L2 acquisition research and pragmatics.

Researchers studying ILP investigate the development of L2 learners' pragmatic acquisition and their use of the target pragmatic knowledge (Kasper, 1996). Researchers try to define who succeeds and who becomes stagnant by identifying the systematic features along the continuum, offering possible explanations to the developmental patterns of L2 pragmatic acquisition, and seeking workable solutions to facilitate the process. Kasper (1992) mentions three main lines of research in interlanguage pragmatics. First, the role of transfer, which deals with the nature of pragmatic development viewed from a second language acquisition perspective for instance the role of L1, the existence of universals of language underlying cross-linguistic variation, the validity for the native norms to be the target for learners, the parallels between L1 and L2 pragmatic development. Second, the role of factors that may affect the development of pragmatic competence such as role of input, role of instruction, type of exposure, and role of personality. Third, the relationship between grammatical knowledge and pragmatic competence, which investigates how pragmatically based linguistic forms and their functions are stored in the mind (for instance, the sequencing of perception and comprehension with regard to the

production, the role of chunk learning, the types of mechanisms driving development from stage to stage).

Cross-cultural differences and L1 influences have been core interests in ILP research (Kasper and Schmidt, 1996). In other words, researchers usually compare the speech act realizations by NSs of the target language, the target language learners (i.e., L2 learners), and the NSs of the learners' language in order to find the differences in the realizations among the three groups and to define how far L2 learners' realization deviates from the target language norms and how closely it retains its native standards (Kasper and Schmidt, 1996). The majority of ILP studies try to compare and contrast pragmatic production either by L2 learners of different levels of L2 proficiency, or with various lengths of residence in the target language community, or in different social settings. Within the area of ILP, L2 learners' speech act realization and pragmatic comprehension have received the most attention. Among the variables, the learning environment and overall L2 proficiency have drawn the most attention with respect to L2 pragmatic competence.

1.5.4 Speech Act Theory

One major component of pragmatic competence is the production and perception of speech acts and their appropriateness within a given context. Speech acts studies have been based on speech act theory developed by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), which asserts that speakers perform an act by producing utterances. Austin (1962) claimed that people use language to do things or have other people to do something

for them. Both Austin and Searle state that the minimal unit of human communication is not a linguistic expression but rather the performance of certain types of acts (e.g., requesting, apologizing, promising, and thanking).

Searle (1975) distinguished between direct and indirect speech acts that greatly influenced speech act research. In a direct speech act, there is a clear relationship between form and function, for example when an imperative is used to make a request (e.g., "Give me a glass of water"). In an indirect speech act, "one illocutionary act is performed indirectly by way of performing another" (p. 60); that is, the illocutionary force of the act is not derivable from the surface structure. For example, when a man says, "Let's go to the beach today" and a woman replies, "I have to clean the house," the woman is not only making a statement about a future obligation but also refusing or rejecting a proposal, even though her statement does not contain an overt or covert expression of rejection. Contrary to direct speech acts, indirect speech acts require "mutually shared factual background information of the speaker and hearer, together with an ability on the part of the hearer to make inferences" (p. 61).

Several researchers, such as Green (1975), Blum-Kulka, (1989), Wierzbicka (1991), Ellis (1994) have criticized speech act theory. The first criticism concerns the issue of universality vs. culture specificity. Following Austin (1962), Searle (1969, 1975) claims that there are general norms for realizing speech acts and those cross-cultural differences are not so different. Brown and Levinson (1987), who hold that strategies for realizing speech acts are essentially the same across cultures even though there

are cultural specifications and elaborations in any particular society, also support this concept of the universality of speech acts. Other scholars (Green, 1975; Blum-Kulka, 1989; Wierzbicka, 1991) however argue that there is considerable variation in the realization of speech acts across cultures and in their studies found that speech acts tend to vary in their conceptualization and verbalization across cultures and languages. For instance Green (1975) argues that a conditional form equivalent to the English 'would' could not be used to introduce an order in other languages such as Spanish and Japanese. In a similar vein, Blum-Kulka et al., (1989) note that certain request strategies are not common across languages; however, that significant differences exist between languages. Wierzbicka (1991) argues that many theorists are under this fallacy that "what seems to hold for the speakers of English must hold for 'people generally'" (p. 25). She points out that most of the speech act studies are from the perspective of Anglo-Saxon ethnocentrism. She claims that the actual realization of a speech act is based on cultural norms and should be different in different cultures. She adds that more balanced speech act studies between Western and non-western cultures will give a clearer picture of the universality or culture-specificity of speech acts.

The second criticism of speech act theory regards the number of speech acts proposed by the theory. Early work on speech acts by Austin (1962) established five classes of speech acts: verdictives, exercitives, commissives, behabitives, and expositives. Criticizing Austin's taxonomy for its inconsistent principle of classification and for using Austin's own introspection as a source for these taxonomies, Searle (1975) grouped speech acts into five new categories. The number of speech acts was later increased to 600 by Ballmer and Brennenstuhl (1981).

Considering that no consensus was ever reached on the exact number of speech acts, Rose (1997b) suggested that it would be best to choose a “core set of essential speech act types” and to teach them in the classroom. However, there remains the problem of how to define and select that core set of essential speech acts.

Although speech act theory has some limitations, it has had much influence on research into the functional aspects of pragmatic theory. As Kasper (1989) notes, research on speech acts has been “central to pragmatic theory” (p. 39). She (1969) further mentions that most of the developmental ILP studies focus on the use of speech act realization by learners at different levels of proficiency using speech act theory. The speech act of requesting, for example, has been investigated from different points of view, including strategies used in terms of directness/indirectness levels and internal and external modifications (Kobayashi and Rinnert, 2003), a cross-cultural comparison of strategic realization (Blum-Kulka, 1991; Iwai and Rinnert, 2001; Rinnert and Kobayashi, 1999), teaching pragmatics and interlanguage pragmatic development in requests (Kasper, 2000, Kasper and Rose, 2002; Rose, 1999), and pragmatic transferability (Takahashi, 1996). As it was seen, speech act theory has been used as a theoretical basis for many cross-cultural and ILP studies. Achiba (2003) pointed out that since the study of speech act provides a useful means of relating linguistic form and communicative intent the speech act theory is important for the studies of pragmatics. As a result, speech acts such as requests, refusals, apologies, compliments, and complaints are still being investigated by focusing on the speaker’s performance. As such, speech act theory remains the most commonly used framework in the study of ILP and cross-cultural pragmatics.

The present work takes off from Kasper and Schmidt's (1996) observation for research in interlanguage pragmatics. Of particular interest in this study is the relationship between language proficiency development and pragmatic competence, specifically in the production of the requestive speech act of Iranian EFL learners across different language proficiency levels in different social situations.

1.5.5 Speech Acts and Social Variables

Bergman and Kasper (1993), Blum-Kulka and House (1989), Brown and Levinson (1987), Kasper and Dahl (1991), Mir (1995), Olshtain (1989), and Shimamura (1993) mention that social variables such as right, obligation, social distance, social power, and gender are an area of cross-cultural difference that may influence speech act production. Hence, it is crucial to find how language learners of different cultures recognize these social variables and how this knowledge is revealed in their production.

Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 74) claim that three sociological factors are crucial in determining the level of directness that speaker will use to an addressee as relative power (P) of H over S, the social distance (D) between S and H, and ranking of imposition (R) involved in doing the face threatening act. Brown and Levinson (1987) define P as an asymmetric social dimension of relative power; it is the degree to which H can impose his or her own plans and self-evaluation at the expense of S's plans and self-evaluation. They further argue that there are two sources of P either of which may be authorized or unauthorized-material control over the action or the

actions of others by virtue of economic distribution and physical force and metaphysical control by virtue of metaphysical forces subscribed to by others. In most cases an individual's power is drawn from both of these sources, or is thought to overlap them (Brown and Levinson, 198, p.77).

Leech (1983, p.126) holds that the term 'social distance is a composite of psychological real factors (status, age, sex, degree of intimacy, etc.) which together determine the overall degree of respectfulness within a given speech situation. In Brown and Levinson's (1987) view, D is a symmetrical social dimension of similarity/ difference within which S and H stand for the purpose of this act. In many cases, it is based on an assessment of the frequency of interaction and the kinds of material or non-material goods exchange between power and social distance (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p.76).

1.6 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is presented in figure 1.3. Bergman and Kasper (1993), Blum-Kulka and House (1989), Brown and Levinson (1987), Kasper and Dahl (1991), Mir (1995), Olshtain (1989), and Shimamura (1993) mention that social variables such as right, obligation, social distance, social power, and gender are an area of cross-cultural difference that may influence speech act production. Hence, it is crucial to find how language learners of different cultures recognize these social variables and how this knowledge is revealed in their production. In this study the effect of social distance and social power on the choice of request features

is investigated. It is believed that based on different social situations different request features are used. Based on Blum-Kulka et al (1987) request features are classified to the directness level of requests (direct, conventionally indirect, and non-conventionally indirect strategies) and the supportive moves (internal and external modification) which are accompanied by the head act of request. Accordingly, in different social situations language learners use either direct strategies or indirect strategy. In addition, they can use alerters and different combination of modifications in their requests. So the present study works on Iranian English learners across three levels of language proficiency when making request in English to (a) show their choice of requests strategies and (b) to find out the effects of social variables as social power and social distance on their choice of strategies.

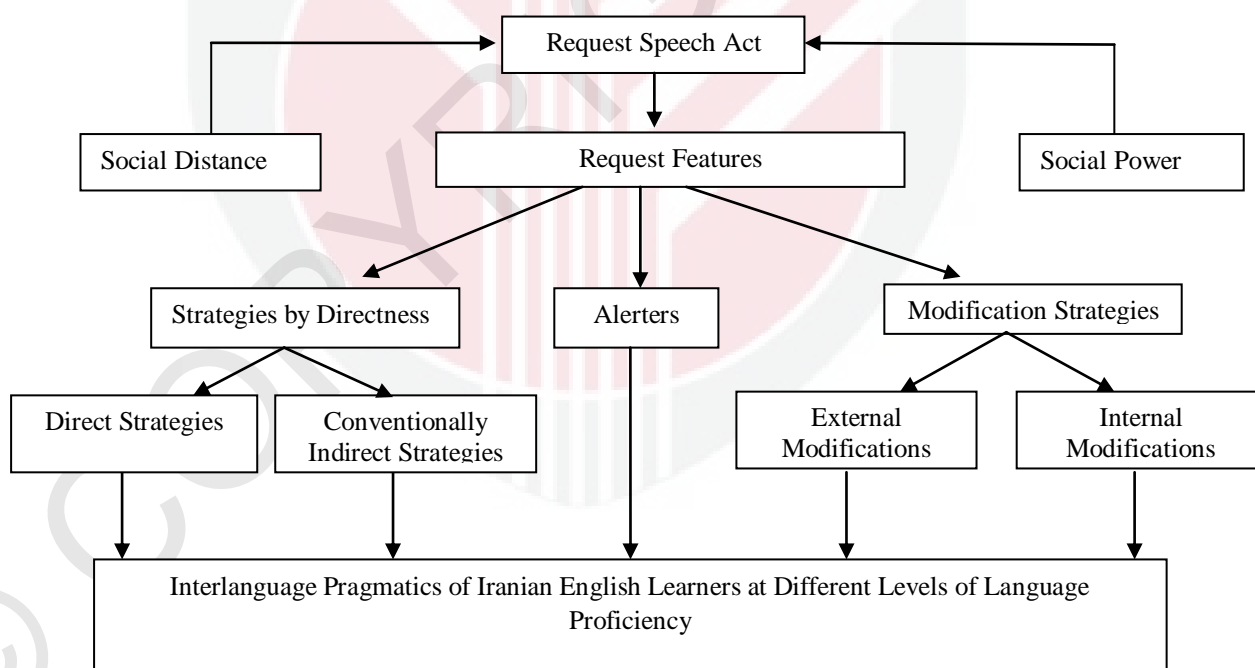


Figure 1.3. Conceptual Framework

1.7 Significance of the Study

This study is significant in a number of ways. Firstly, the results of this study add useful data to the interlanguage pragmatic literature and it increases the understanding of the effect of second language proficiency on pragmatic competence. In addition, as no study has investigated Persian EFL learners' production of requestive speech act regarding their language proficiency, this study fills the gap in interlanguage pragmatics and provides a basis for studies that focus on Persian EFL learners' speech act production, comprehension, and acquisition. Besides, the results of this study has significance for English learning programs in Iran with regard to whether these programs are capable of equipping its learners with pragmatic competence in the target language and providing them with communicative competence proficiency in English. Knowing a language is not simply being able to form grammatically correct sentences; rather it also implies possession of knowledge by the language users on the social appropriateness of these sentences. Therefore language user's lack of this knowledge may present pitfalls in the process of communication. Therefore, the goal of language educators should be educating language learners in both how to form grammatically correct sentences as well as how to use these sentences in appropriate contexts. The results of this study will help all those who have a share in second language (SL) enterprise, such as material developers, language teachers, and test designers with their efforts to contribute to the achievement of pragmatic competence.

1.8 Defenition of Terms

Pragmatic Competence: Bialystok (1993) defines pragmatic competence as the speaker's ability to use language for different purposes; the listener's ability to get past the language and understand the speaker's real intentions and the command of the rules by which utterances come together to create discourse. Garcia (2004, p.16) defines pragmatic competence as a language user's ability to produce language for different purposes and to comprehend speaker intention. It also refers to a language user's knowledge of social rules of appropriacy and awareness of how utterances are linked together in coherent discourse. Pragmatic competence consists of the knowledge that speakers use in order to achieve their specific purpose and listeners use to understand the language.

Communicative Competence: The grammatical and pragmatic knowledge of language speakers when communicating shapes their communicative competence (Hymes, 1966). Communicative competence is the grammatical and pragmatic knowledge of language learners when using language.

Requestive speech act: Based on Blum-Kulka, Danet, and Gheron (1985), requests are defined as pre-event acts; they express speakers' expectation towards some prospective action, verbal or non verbal, on the part of the hearer. Searle (1969) defines request as an illocutionary act whereby a speaker conveys to the hearer that s/he wants the hearer to perform an act, which is for the benefit of the speaker. So,

requestive speech act is an illocutionary force that affects hearer's behavior in such a way that gets the hearer to do something.

Social power: It is an asymmetrical social dimension of relative power denoting the degree to which the speaker can impose his or her will on the hearer.

Social distance: It is a symmetrical variable representing the social distance between speaker and hearer, and it encompasses factors like degree of familiarity and frequency of interaction.

1.9 Organization of Thesis

The next chapter, chapter two, reviews the theoretical foundations and empirical works related to the study, and ends with approaches to data collection in ILP research. In chapter three research design, sampling, data collection methods and instruments, framework for data classification, and methods of data analysis are introduced. Chapter four presents the results achieved in the study and chapter five brings a discussion based on research questions. Chapter six, summarizes the key findings of the study, addresses its limitations, implications, and suggestions for further research. Finally, the list of references and appendixes complete the study.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Informed Consent Form

You are invited to participate in this research study. The following information is provided in order to help you to make an informed decision whether or not to participate. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask. The purpose of this study is to investigate cross-cultural differences in speech acts behaviours. If you agree to participate, you will fill out a background questionnaire and a Discourse Completion Task (DCT).. The whole process will take about 30 minutes of your time. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the investigators or the institution. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Upon your request to withdraw, all information pertaining to you will be destroyed. If you choose to participate, all information will be held in strict confidence. Any use of information you provide in this study will be considered in combination with those from other participants. The information obtained in the study may be published in academic journals or presented at scientific meetings, but your identity will be kept strictly confidential and your name remains anonymous. There is no known risk associated with this research. If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign the statement below.

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Informed Consent Form (continued)

VOLUNTARY CONSENT FORM:

I have read and understand the information on this consent form. I consent to participate in this study. I understand that my responses are completely confidential and that I have the right to withdraw at any time. I have received an unsigned copy of this Informed Consent Form to keep in my possession.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix B

Background Questionnaire

Gender: M / F

Age: _____

Place of Birth: _____

Country of Origin: _____ Native Language: _____

Institution where currently enrolled: _____

Major: _____

College level: Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior

Do you Speak Languages Other than English? Yes No . If yes

How long have you studied the Language: _____

Have you ever lived in a foreign country? _____ . If yes

Where? _____ . How long? _____

Appendix C

Discourse Completion Task

Dear Participant:

The purpose of this study is to investigate cross-cultural differences in speech acts behaviours. This is not a test; there is no right or wrong answer. There are 12 situations in this questionnaire. Please read each situation carefully, and imagine that you are in the same situation. Then, respond naturally using the same language you would use in your daily interaction as if you are talking to a person in front of you. If you have any questions about any of the situations, please don't hesitate to ask. Thank you for your time.

Example

You are a computer lab supervisor at the university. Two students are talking loudly in the lab. It is obvious that their loud voice is disturbing other students. You go to them and say...

Excuse me guys! Could you please lower your voice; students are trying to concentrate. Thanks.

Situation 1

You are taking a course in sociology. In today's class, the professor mentions a new article "Religion & Culture". You are interested in the topic so you go to the library to read the article. Unfortunately, the library does not have the article, and you decide

to borrow it from the professor. This is your third course with this professor and you have a good relationship with him/her. You go to the professor's office and say...

Situation 2

You are graduating this semester and planning to apply for the Master's program. You need to submit a recommendation letter with the application, and you want your "Academic Advisor", who you know well, to write it for you. You go to the professor's office and say...

Situation 3

Tomorrow is the deadline for one of your final papers. You have many other assignments and cannot finish the paper on time. This is your first course with this professor and you have never spoken with him/her before; however, you decide to talk to the professor about an extension on the paper. You go to the professor's office and say...

Situation 4

You have to take a course in (psychology) in order to graduate. The section that suits your time is closed and you have to get the professor's permission to add it. You have never met the professor before but you decide to see him/her about adding the course. You go to the professor's office and say...

Situation 5

You have been helping your neighbor, a high school student, with his/her studies for two months now. Your next meeting with him/her is Monday evening. You have an exam on Tuesday and you want to postpone your appointment with your neighbor till Wednesday evening. You say...

Situation 6

You are living in a first- floor apartment. You have an exam tomorrow and you are trying to study. You can't focus because your neighbor's kids, in 9th and 10th grades, are playing football outside your window. You have been neighbors for more than a year now. You want to ask them to play somewhere else. You open the window and say...

Situation 7

You are a university professor. You have a department meeting and you have to cancel one of today's classes. One of the course students stops by your office to inquire about one of the requirements. This is the student's first course with you and you don't know him that well. You want the student to post an announcement about cancelling today's class at the classroom door. You say...

Situation 8

You are a university professor. This is the first day in the semester and you are teaching a course for first year students. You come to today's class carrying many books and papers to share with students. The class finishes and you want a student to help you carry the books to your office. You look at a student standing close to you and say...

Situation 9

You have been sharing an apartment with a friend for two years now. While you were working on your assignments, your computer stopped working. You want to use your friend's computer and finish your assignments. You go to your friend and say...

Situation 10

You are taking a course in “Management”, and you are required to buy an expensive book. You do not think that you will be using the book after this semester. You want to borrow it from your friend who took the same course last semester. You go to your friend and say...

Situation 11

You are taking a course in “Politics”. Last week, you had a bad cold and missed very important classes. You see one of your classmates in the library. You have never spoken with this classmate before but you know that he/she is an excellent student, and you want to copy his/her notebook. You go to your classmate and say...

Situation 12

You are having trouble understanding your (Mathematics) course. You hear that some of the course students have formed a study group to prepare for the midterm exam. You have never spoken with those students before but you decide to talk to them about joining the study group. You approach one of study group students and say...

BIODATA OF STUDENT

Shahla Amooaliakbari Najafabadi earned her B.A. in Teaching English as a Foreign Language from Islamic Azad University in Iran, her M.A. in General Linguistics from Zahedan University, and her PhD in English Language from Universiti Putra Malaysia. She is currently working as a research assistant at the University of British Columbia.



LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

Amooaliakbari, S., Paramasivam, S. (2012). Iranian EFL Learners' Interlanguage Request Modification: Use of External and Internal Supportive Moves. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*. 2 (7): 1387-1396.





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