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Exploring Pragmalinguistic and Sociopragmatic Variability in Speech Act Production of L2 Learners and Native Speakers

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Abstract

The pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic aspects of language use vary across different situations, languages, and cultures. The separation of these two facets of language use can help to map out the socio-cultural norms and conventions as well as the linguistic forms and strategies that underlie the pragmatic performance of different language speakers in a variety of target language use situations. This study explored the sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic variations in the expression and realization of three speech acts of apology, request, and refusal by American native speakers and Iranian EFL learners. The participants were 100 graduate and undergraduate Iranian students and 50 American native speakers. A written discourse completion test (WDCT) was developed through a bottom-up procedure and used for collecting the data. The results showed that considerable variations emerged in the semantic formulae, sociopragmatic content, and pragmalinguistic forms the participants employed in realizing the speech acts in relation to the contextual variables and individual differences. The American

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participants employed more (pragmalinguistic) formulaic strategies and were generally more direct than the Iranian L2 learners. Further variability was also noticeable in the participants' choice of sociopragmatic appropriacy formulae in order to mitigate their speech acts and avoid offending their interlocutors. The findings indicated that there is an intricate reciprocity between the sociopragmatic values and the variant forms or strategies that language users employ on the pragmalinguistic level of language use. It is then suggested that pragmatic variation be traced and probed on the two pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic planes of language use in real-life (or simulated) contexts.

Keywords: pragmatic variability, pragmalinguistics, sociopragmatics, speech acts

1. Introduction

Pragmatic competence is "the ability to use language appropriately in a social context" which involves both innate and learned capacities and develops naturally through a socialization process (Taguchi, 2009, p. 1). According to Dippold (2008), it is understood as knowledge of forms and strategies to convey particular illocutions (i.e. pragmalinguistic competence) and knowledge of the use of these forms and strategies in an appropriate context (i.e. sociopragmatic competence). In order to be pragmatically competent, learners must map their sociopragmatic knowledge on pragmalinguistic forms and strategies and be able to use their knowledge online under the constraints of a communicative situation (McNamara & Roever, 2006; Roever, 2004).

The distinction between pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic aspects of communication is an important one for both learners and teachers since both aspects must be considered in learning or teaching a language (Trosborg, 2010). According to Liu (2004), any failure in L2 learners' comprehension and production of the idiosyncrasies of either component in any language use situation would lead to pragmatic failure or communication breakdown. As he states, pragmalinguistic failure relates to a linguistic deficiency "caused by differences in the linguistic encoding of pragmatic force", while sociopragmatic failure results from a lack of sociocultural knowledge and "cross-culturally different perceptions of what constitutes appropriate linguistic behavior" (p. 16).

In order to decrease instances of pragmatic failure, students should learn pragmalinguistic as well as sociopragmatic aspects of the target language use. However, as Yates (2010) points out, these two aspects cannot be taught unless teachers almost consciously know how these facets of communicative acts are realized in various contexts of language use.

The study of speech act realization patterns and strategies in a wide range of language use situations has so forth yielded insightful results in comparative cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics research that explore how force can be mapped onto form by different language users (e.g., Achiba, 2003; Al-Zumor, 2011; Bardovi-Harlig, 2002; Barron, 2008; Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989; Kasper & Rose, 2002; Nureddeen, 2008; Ogiermann, 2009; Rue & Zhang, 2008; Woodfield, 2008). This cross-cultural pragmatics line of inquiry has mainly examined how different types of speech acts are realized by nonnative speakers (NNSs) of a second language (L2) with a variety of language backgrounds and other learner-specific variations. This research has also investigated the differences between L2 learners and native speakers (NSs) in their choice of speech acts realization strategies, content, or form. Despite the rich literature on cross-cultural pragmatics, no sufficient research has yet been undertaken to explore the pragmalinguistic features and sociopragmatic values of speakers' pragmatic performance across different languages and cultures. Therefore, as Trosborg (2010) states, much work is needed not only to investigate what is said by whom in what situation, but also why language is used the way it is. On that account, this study aims to explore the sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic variations between American English NSs' and Iranian EFL learners' in their production of the apology, request, and refusal speech acts, using a written discourse completion test (WDCT) instrument and its accompanying multidimensional scoring system.

2. Background

Pragmatic competence is a central component in Bachman's (1990, 2000) and Bachman and Palmer's (1996, 2010) model of language

competence. It is regarded as one of the two main components of language competence parallel to organizational competence. Pragmatic competence is the ability to convey and interpret meaning appropriately in a social situation which "has become an object of inquiry in a wide range of disciplines including linguistics, applied linguistics, anthropology, sociology, psychology, communication research, and cross-cultural studies" (Taguchi, 2009, p. 1). It is divided into two components of pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics (Leech, 1983; Thomas, 1983). According to Kasper and Rose (2001), pragmalinguistics is the linguistic resources available for conveying communicative acts and performing pragmatic functions. The resources "include pragmatic strategies such as directness and indirectness, routines, and a large range of linguistic forms which can intensify or soften communicative acts" (p. 2). In other words, as Kasper and Roever (2005) state, pragmalinguistics focuses on the intersection of pragmatics and linguistic forms and comprises the knowledge and ability for the use of conventions of meanings (e.g. the strategies for realizing speech acts) and conventions of forms (e.g. linguistic forms implementing speech act strategies). Sociopragmatics is the interface of sociology and pragmatics and refers to "the social perceptions underlying participants' interpretation and performance of communicative action" (Kasper & Rose, 2001, p. 2). As Kasper and Roever (2005) assert, sociopragmatics encompasses the knowledge of the relationships between communicative action and power, social distance, imposition, and the social conditions and consequences of what you do, when, and to whom.

Research into pragmatics (e.g. Bardovi-Harlig, 2002; Kasper & Rose, 2002) has demonstrated that the pragmatic knowledge of nonnative language learners and that of NSs can be quite different. Part and parcel of pragmatic variability emerges in the production of speech acts. In Cohen's (2008) terms, speech acts refer to the ways in which people carry out specific social functions in speaking such as apologizing, complaining, making requests, refusing things/invitations, or complementing. A growing body of empirical evidence in pragmatics, as Woodfield (2008) points out, focuses on language learners' pragmatic

knowledge and the way they employ such knowledge in the performance of speech acts in an L2. That is, these studies concentrate on how native speakers and learners employ pragmatic strategies such as directness and indirectness, routines, and a range of linguistic forms to intensify or soften communicative acts. These studies do not deal with the sociopragmatic component or just provide general descriptions of the situational context.

The largest speech act study has been the cross-cultural speech act realization project (CCSARP) conducted by Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989). They focused on requests and apologies in five languages (i.e. Canadian French, Danish, German, Hebrew, and English) to establish native speakers' patterns of realization, compare speech acts across languages, and establish the similarities and differences between NSs and NNSs in the realization of these acts. The framework used by the CCSARP was replicated in later speech act studies (e.g. Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1384; Kasper, 1989) and led to a large body of comparable data from many more languages. Consequently, continuing debate between universality and culture-specificity in speech act realization appeared.

Eslami-Rasekh (1993) investigated request realization patterns of native speakers of American English and Persian by using an open questionnaire. The results of the data analysis showed that Persian speakers were more direct and used more alerters, supportive moves, and internal modifiers than the Americans. She concluded that the Persians utilized such strategies to mitigate the level of directness. They also opted for politeness by assuming that a single direct request without any supportive moves was too inappropriate to get the message across.

Also, Afghari (2007) explored the range of strategies the Persian speakers used in realizing the apology speech act to see if Persian apologies were as formulaic in pragmatic structures as English apologies. A discourse completion test (DCT) was used for collecting the data. The findings indicated that Persian apologies were formulaic in pragmatic structures. A direct expression of apology (IFID) and an acknowledgement of responsibility such as *'It was my fault'* were the

most frequent apology formulae. Besides, the sociopragmatic variables of social distance and dominance between the interlocutors were found to have significant effects on the frequency of the intensifiers such as *'Very/Really'* in different situations. The most intensified apologies were offered to friends and the least intensified ones to the strangers.

Later, in a comparative study on the use of requests by Japanese learners of English and British English (BE) native speaker students, Woodfield (2008) indicated that both participants preferred conventionally indirect strategies such as *'Could you do it?'*. However, the Japanese learners exhibited a higher proportion of direct strategies than the BE group. Moreover, the learners used fewer internal mitigations than the BE group. Also, Ogiermann (2009) investigated cross-cultural differences between Russian and Polish in dealing with offensive situations and revealed some culture-specific perceptions of what constituted an apology and what constituted politeness in the Slavic and Anglo-Saxon cultures.

Allami and Naeimi (2010) in their study on exploring the differences between American native speakers and Persian speaking learners of English in the production of the refusal found that there were differences in the frequency, shift, and content of semantic formulae used in refusals by Iranian and American speakers. The American participants were more specific and concrete than the Persian learners. However, Iranians used various formulae such as '*I know that you are one of my best workers'* more than the Americans to soften their refusals. Moreover, they used consistent patterns in their refusals, whereas the Persian participants showed a high level of frequency shift in their use of several semantic formulae.

Finally, Alamdari, Esmaeilnia, and Nematpour (2010) compared Iranian students' refusal with those of native Australian speakers. They analyzed the data according to Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz's (1990) framework and indicated that the two groups were different in their use of refusal strategies. Three categories of 'statement of regret', 'excuse/cause/explanation,' and 'negative willingness ability' were common among the natives, while 'excuse/cause/explanation' was the

frequent strategy preferred by the Iranian students. They concluded that Iranian EFL learners tended to use limited strategies because of their limited pragmatic knowledge.

The relationship between sociopragmatic competence and pragmalinguistic competence in the development of L2 pragmatic competence has also been addressed in several studies (e.g. Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1993; Barron, 2003; Rose, 2009). They mostly favored the precedence of pragmalinguistics over sociopragmatics instead of dealing with the reciprocity of the two pragmatic levels. For instance, Barron (2003) examined the development of Irish learners of German in producing the three speech acts of request, refusal, and offer. They found that the learners achieved great improvement in their pragmalinguistic competence, but little sociopragmatic development. The participants' exposure to L2 input triggered some important developments in their use of routines, syntactic, and lexical downgraders. Yet, Chang (2011) has asserted that the relationship between sociopragmatic competence and pragmalinguistic competence is a complex and interwoven one. Consequently, it is difficult to draw a clear boundary between them. Thus, any exploration of pragmatic variability should address the pragmalinguistic forms and strategies in relation to the sociopragmatic values and norms of language speakers.

To sum up, the aforementioned studies do not provide a complete picture of the sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic aspects of pragmatics. As Yates (2004) argues, the secret nature and intricacy of many sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic conventions can be hazardous for learners and may lead to pragmatic failure. Therefore, investigating the ways in which NNSs and NSs as well as learners with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds differ in pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge is of great importance.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

The participants of the study included 240 graduate and undergraduate Iranian university students majoring in English Translation, Literature,

and Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) and 60 native speakers of English. The nonnative speakers were both female and male EFL students at Shahrekord (n = 150), Shiraz (n = 30), Isfahan (n = 30), and Tehran (n = 30) universities, with the age range of 19-29. The NSs were selected from American English-speaking students studying at several American universities, mainly Columbia University and the American members of the LTEST-L group.

3.2 Instrumentation

An open-ended production test (WDCT) was developed and used to assess the participants' ability to produce the speech acts of request, apology, and refusal in English. Despite criticisms leveled against the use of WDCTs in eliciting authentic speech act behavior, as Kasper (2000) asserts, such instruments are useful to be informed about language speakers' pragmalinguistic as well as sociopragmatic knowledge. The WDCT was open-ended and included 27 items, each of which had a situation and a blank followed by a rejoinder, where a certain kind of speech act was expected. As Roever (2005) states, the use of rejoinders can limit the range of allowable responses to an item and facilitate rating. Different combinations of the three sociopragmatic variables (i.e. power, social distance, and degree of imposition) were used in constructing the situations (i.e. scenarios) and assessing variability. The scenarios required the test takers to produce one of the speech acts of request, apology, and refusal. According to Ogiermann (2009) and Hudson (2001), these three speech acts are supposed to be the most frequent speech acts in normal everyday talks and appropriate for exploring speech act realization patterns across a number of languages.

3.3 Procedure

The developmental process of the pragmatics test consisted of three major stages: exemplar generation, expert judgments, and pilot testing. Exemplar generation helped to collect situations directly from the test takers and thus ensured the authenticity of the situations. Expert judgments helped to include plausible and consistent scenarios, and the

pilot was conducted in order to determine the practical feasibility of the inquiry and to ensure that the answers were examples of the data the researcher expected. The construct validity of the test was examined on the basis of the factor analysis (Principal Components Analysis). An inspection of the screeplot initially revealed a clear break after the third component. Using Catell's (1966) scree test and Horn's (1965) Parallel Analysis (PA), it was decided to retain three components for further investigation. The rotated solution revealed the presence of a simple structure, with three components showing a number of strong loadings. The results of the complementary analysis of the item loadings supported the use of the test items for assessing the (L2) pragmatic knowledge in producing the three speech acts of apology, request, and refusal. Finally, Cronbach's alpha was computed for (internal) reliability estimates (r = 0.94).

The developed WDCT was administered to 50 NSs of English and 100 students in Shahrekord, Shiraz, Tehran, and Isfahan universities. The participants were asked to write what they would respond in the situations they were provided with. Besides, they were also asked to write as much as it was thought to be appropriate for each situation.

The data were evaluated and scored through the development and use of a multidimensional scoring system. An appropriacy or sociopragmatic scale in the form of a 5-point Likert scale (i.e. from 1: very inappropriate to 5: very appropriate) was used to assess the appropriacy of the responses considering the particular combination of the sociopragmatic variables of power, social distance, and degree of imposition each item depicted. The pragmalinguistic accuracy of the responses was evaluated and scored using two complementary and additive subscales. First, a binary (0-1) accuracy scale was used to determine whether their responses were linguistically accurate, hence representing the particular speech act. Second, an analytic, multilevel pragmalinguistic scale (1-4) was used to assess and score the pragmalinguistic strategies employed for each item with reference to the patterns evidenced in the NSs' data as well as in the related literature.

In order to ensure the raters' consistency in rating the sociopragmatic appropriacy and the pragmalinguistic accuracy of the participants based on the multidimensional scoring scale, the raters (two graduate students) were asked to attend training and standardization meetings before scoring the data. The reliability of the raters' scoring was estimated separately for each dimension. The Kappa measure of agreement value was 0.71 for sociopragmatic interrater reliability and 0.74 for pragmalinguistic interrater reliability. As Peat (2001) states, a Kappa value above 0.70 represents a good agreement and measure of interrater consistency.

4. Results

4.1 Sociopragmatic-appropriacy variability

In order to investigate the sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic differences between the NSs and NNSs, a series of Chi-squares was run. Table 1 indicates the Chi-square values for the participants' sociopragmatic performances on the *apology* situations.

Table 1. The Chi-square results of the participants' sociopragmatic performances (apology)

Items		Value	*df*	Asymp. *Sig.* (2-sided)
Item 1	Pearson Chi-Square	17.548	4	.002
Item 2		10.182	4	.037
Item 3		18.703	4	.001
Item 4		10.909	4	.028
Item 5		34.913	4	.000
Item 6		18.831	4	.001
Item 7		10.756	4	.029
Item 8		32.754	4	.000
Item 9		17.090	4	.002
	N of Valid cases	150		

The results demonstrated that there was a significant difference between the NSs' and the NNSs' sociopragmatic performances producing appropriate apology speech acts. The American participants utilized various kinds of strategies in the three +*power*, +*imposition*, and -*social*

distance situations. The four categories which the Americans used frequently were the use of 'Intensifiers,' 'Illocutionary force indicating device (IFID),' 'Explanation of cause,' and 'Offer of repair.' An example of the way they apologized using these categories is: '*I am really sorry. I have been busy. I will take you tomorrow*.' By contrast, the Iranian participants used fewer strategies in apologizing. The most frequent strategies among the Iranians were 'IFID' and 'Offer of repair.' For example: '*Sorry. I promise to take you tomorrow*.' However, for the -*power*, -*imposition*, and -*social distance* situations both of the NSs and the NNSs utilized 'Explanation of cause' such as '*Traffic was really bad*.' Moreover, most of the NNSs tended to use 'Promise of forbearance' like '*This won't happen again*' in these situations.

The Chi-square results of the variation between the NSs' and the NNSs' sociopragmatic scores in *request* situations are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2. The Chi-square results of the participants' sociopragmatic performances (request)

Items		Value	*df*	Asymp. *Sig.* (2-sided)
Item 10	Pearson Chi-Square	36.276	4	.000
Item 11		16.99	4	.002
Item 12		30.707	4	.000
Item 13		20.127	4	.000
Item 14		12.738	4	.013
Item 15		10.549	4	.032
Item 16		16.119	4	.003
Item 17		9.757	4	.045
Item 18		28.405	4	.000
	N of Valid cases	150		

According to Table 2, the NS and the NNS preferred different speech act realization patterns based on their perceptions of the sociopragmatic appropriacy needed to perform the communicative act. An inspection of the results indicates that in the +*power*, -*imposition*, and -*social distance* situations, the American participants mostly used the 'Mood drivable' strategy such as '*Turn off your phone*' in making

requests, while the 'Explicit performative' strategy such as '*I'm asking you to turn off your phone*' was the most common strategy among the Iranian participants. By contrast, for those *-power*, *+imposition*, and *-social distance* situations, both groups employed the 'Query preparatory' strategy such as '*Could you cook for my party?*'

Table 3 shows the Chi-square values of the participants' sociopragmatic performances on *refusal* situations.

Table 3. The Chi-square results of the participants' sociopragmatic performances (refusal)

Items		Value	*df*	Asymp. *Sig.* (2-sided)
Item 19	Pearson Chi-Square	9.496	4	.050
Item 20		16.726	4	.002
Item 21		11.582	4	.021
Item 22		9.555	4	.049
Item 23		20.737	4	.000
Item 24		12.506	4	.014
Item 25		29.951	4	.000
Item 26		10.065	4	.039
Item 27		30.641	4	.000
	N of Valid cases	150		

As Table 3 shows, significant differences existed between the NSs' and the NNSs' sociopragmatic performances on refusal situations. Considering the situations of refusal, it was observed that both groups of participants tended to begin the refusal with an 'Apology' followed by 'Reason.' An example of this type of expression is '*I am sorry. I have finals this week and I have to study all week*.' Besides, further analysis showed that plain refusals such as '*No*, *thank you*' and expression of 'Negative ability' like '*I cannot*' were rarely used by the Iranian L2 learners.

4.2 Pragmalinguistic-accuracy variability

To see if there were any significant differences in the pragmalinguistic performances of the NSs and the NNSs on the test, another series of Chi-

square was run. Table 4 depicts the results of the Chi-square test for the pragmalinguistic variation in the *apology* situations.

Table 4. The Chi-square results of the participants' pragmalinguistic performances (apology)

Items		Value	*df*	Asymp. *Sig.* (2-sided)
Item 1	Pearson Chi-Square	14.078	3	.003
Item 2		13.261	3	.004
Item 3		8.341	3	.039
Item 4		10.629	3	.014
Item 5		8.640	3	.034
Item 6		7.665	3	.050
Item 7		12.544	3	.006
Item 8		13.080	3	.004
Item 9		13.469	3	.004
	N of Valid cases	150		

The results indicated that there was a significant difference between the NSs' and the NNSs' pragmalinguistic performance. The analysis shows that although their use of pragmalinguistic accuracy structures was different, both of the NSs and the NNSs used direct strategies such as '*I'm sorry/I regret*' to apologize. In addition, the Americans used adverbials such as '*I'm really sorry*' or repetition (double intensifier) like '*I'm very very sorry*.'

Table 5 reveals the Chi-square results of the participants' pragmalinguistic performance on different *request* situations.

Table 5. The Chi-square results of the participants' pragmalinguistic performances (request)

Items		Value	*df*	Asymp. *Sig.* (2-sided)
Item 10	Pearson Chi-Square	7.963	3	.047
Item 11		11.66	3	.009
Item 12		12.300	3	.006
Item 13		8.901	3	.031
Item 14		7.459	3	.050
Item 15		12.494	3	.006
Item 16		13.170	3	.004
Item 17		8.492	3	.037
Item 18		13.545	3	.004
	N of Valid cases	150		

As Table 5 demonstrates, the discrepancies between the NSs' and the NNSs' pragmalinguistic performances were statistically significant. An examination of the results shows that the NSs as well as the NNSs were either direct such as *'Turn off your phone*/*I am asking you to turn off your phones*' or conventionally indirect as '*Would you do it?*' in requesting. The syntactic downgrader such as 'Interrogative' was used by both participants, while the lexical downgrader '*Please*' was just common among the NSs.

The Chi-square values of the respondents' pragmalinguistic performances on *refusal* scenarios are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. The Chi-square results of the participants' pragmalinguistic performances (refusal)

Items		Value	*df*	Asymp. *Sig.* (2-sided)
Item 19	Pearson Chi-Square	10.407	3	.015
Item 20		7.863	3	.049
Item 21		9.499	3	.023
Item 22		13.848	3	.003
Item 23		10.976	3	.012
Item 24		7.591	3	.050
Item 25		10.800	3	.013
Item 26		14.331	3	.002
Item 27		15.598	3	.001
	N of Valid cases	150		

According to Table 6, the NSs' and the NNSs' pragmalinguistic structures were significantly different. Further analysis showed that most of the NSs opted for the indirect strategy such as '*I feel terrible*,' whereas the NNSs preferred both direct nonperformative statement such as '*I don't think so*' and indirect strategy like '*I am sorry*' in refusing. The frequent use of fillers such as '*Oh*' and '*Uhm*' by the Americans, and intensifiers like '*Terribly*' and '*Really*' by the Iranian participants was also noticeable.

Overall, the Chi-square results showed that there were considerable discrepancies and pragmatic variations between the NSs and the NNSs in their productions of the three speech acts (i.e. apology, request, and refusal). These pragmatic differences were realized both in terms of the sociopragmatic appropriacy and the pragmalinguistic accuracy strategies used by the NSs and the NNSs. Needless to say, there was an association between being a (non)native speaker and the sociopragmatic appropriacy or pragmalinguistic accuracy of the speech acts used in these situations.

5. Discussion

The analysis of the data related to the apology situations showed that the Americans and the Iranian participants varied in the way they framed their apologies according to the three sociopragmatic variables of power, social distance, and degree of imposition. As Tatton (2008) argues, the variation might be due to sociocultural differences in the participants' perception of these variables. This finding is supported by Ogiermann (2009) who claims that culture is a factor responsible for varying assessments of the variables resulting in differences in the selection of (in)appropriate strategies. The analysis of the strategies used by both groups revealed that the American participants utilized more strategies in apologizing than the Iranian participants. The reason, as Kwon (2003) points out, may be the limited pragmatic capacity of the learners or their limited knowledge of L2 sociolinguistic rules.

The comparison of the level of directness of apology strategies showed that direct strategies were the most favored strategies used by both groups. The IFID was the most frequent direct strategy, indicating

that both groups tried to preserve their positive face since, in Nureddeen's (2008) words, this strategy would be a less risky one. Moreover, both groups were concerned about the hearer since they both used 'Explanation of cause' to justify the offence and placate the hearer. Moreover, the NSs tried to divert the hearers' attention from the offence. As Marquez Reiter (2000) argues, one way to divert attention from the offence is the use of intensifiers, which were used by the NSs. In contrast, the NNSs used promise of forbearance to admit responsibility.

The findings confirm the claim by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) that IFID emerges to varying degrees in all situations in most languages while the other apologizing semantic formulae are situation-dependent. In a similar vein, Afghari (2007) found that a direct expression of apology and an acknowledgement of responsibility were the most frequent apology formulae offered by Persians across the majority of the apology situations.

The analysis of both sets of data from the request situations indicated that the choice of request strategy was again influenced by the assessment of the three variables of power, social distance, and imposition. The participants' use of direct or indirect situations in different situations may clear the point. Moreover, the Americans were significantly more direct when making requests than the Iranians. According to Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) and Eslami-Rasekh (1993), the level of directness of a request has a strong correlation with the expectation of right and obligations between hearers and speakers. The greater the right of the speaker to ask *(+power*) and the greater the obligation of the hearer to comply with the request *(-power*), the less is the motivation for the use of indirectness. The frequent use of syntactic downgraders by both groups or lexical downgraders by the Americans reveals that they both try to mitigate their requests. This strong preference for modifications in the English and Iranian data confirms previous findings (e.g. Eslami-Rasekh, 1993; Ogiermann, 2009). Moreover, the Iranian participants produced sweetener (an external modifier) such as *'You are such a good cook*' more than the Americans to reduce the imposition involved.

The findings related to the directness level of request strategies contrast with Eslami-Rasekh's (1993) cross-cultural study. She found that Persian speakers used direct strategies more than the North American NSs. According to her, the reason may lie in the fact that Persian society is less individualistic and more psychologically depends on group mentality. Therefore, its people tended more toward using strategies of positive politeness which is opposed to negative politeness. In a similar vein, Ogiermann (2009) indicated that English and German speakers showed a strong preference for conventional indirectness.

Considering the situations of refusal, the Americans' and the Iranians' refusal strategies revealed that the American participants preferred a direct strategy, while the Iranians utilized both direct strategies and indirect strategies. In the contexts of L2 use, the perception of the varying social and interpersonal factors, such as interlocutors' power difference, social distance, and the degree of imposition, has influenced different participants' directness levels, particularly Iranians' varied directness levels of speech act expressions.

The analysis of the data indicated that both groups of participants tended to begin refusals with an apology followed by a reason attributed to a concern for ending the refusal quickly. Considering the data, the American English reasons were found to be clearer and concrete in refusing. Plain refusals such as '*No*, *Thank you*' and expression of negative ability were rarely used by the Iranian speakers. By explanation, these expressions are highly face-threatening (Lyuh, 1992), and Iranians usually cannot say 'no' directly to their addressees. In fact, they tried to protect both their interlocutor's and their own face. The frequent use of fillers by the Americans, and intensifiers by the Iranian participants also pointed to the participants' concern about their interlocutors. It seems that pragmatic transfer from Iranian culture occurs. Al-Issa's (2003) belief that the sociocultural transfer may influence the EFL learners' responses can support the above conclusion. The findings of the present study support the findings of the study by Alamdari, Esmaeilnia, and Nematpour (2010). They found that the Iranian EFL students utilized fewer negative ability strategies in their refusals than the native English

speakers. The frequent use of fillers by the Americans and the use of intensifiers by the Iranian participants also pointed to the participants' concern about their interlocutors.

The overall findings corroborate the cross-cultural pragmatic variations documented in Allami and Naeimi's (2010) study. They found that there were differences in the frequency, shift, and content of semantic formulae used in refusals by Iranian and American speakers. The Iranian participants used direct refusals considerably more towards a person of low status. Expression of regret and excuse/reason were the common strategies among both groups. Finally, the Iranian L2 learners tended to take a more mitigating approach than the American participants to soften their refusals.

To sum up, in spite of the presence of a similar range of strategies, noticeable cross-cultural pragmatic variability was evidenced in the frequency and semantic content of the sociopragmatic formulae as well as the pragmalinguistic forms used in each language use situation. Pragmalinguistic variability was scrutinized in relation to sociopragmatic variations focusing on the contextual variables of power, social distance, and imposition for each speech act and learner-specific attributes. It was revealed that careful consideration of the interdependent dynamicity between the two levels of pragmatics can better depict why language users employ different speech act realization patterns across situations and cultures. The above findings can enrich the growing literature (e.g., Chang, 2010; Felix-Brasdefer, 2003; Marquez Reiter, 2000) where pragmatic variability has been explored with reference to the sociopragmatics and pragmalinguistics reciprocity.

6. Pedagogical Implications

As to the implications of the study for L2 research and pedagogy, it is suggested that, given the documented intricate reciprocity between the two levels of pragmatics, future cross-cultural pragmatics research should attempt to approach pragmatic variability on the two pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic planes of language use in context. This integrated approach can more clearly reveal why language users resort to varying

speech act realization patterns across situations and cultures. In addition, the findings related to the speech act realization patterns that emerged in the American and Iranian participants' data can provide a starting point for classroom exploratory interactive activities to further probe the cross-cultural L2 pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic variability by EFL teachers and learners. L2 teachers can benefit from the findings when planning metapragmatic assessment tasks and activities for L2 learners to deal with the patterns of realizing the apology, request, and refusal speech acts in the target community, the strategies and linguistic means needed to implement these speech acts, and the ways of making contextually appropriate choices. This way, they help learners to enhance their awareness and knowledge of appropriate speech act use and how to sound pragmatically appropriate in L2 use situations. Finally, the study underscores the importance of incorporating L2 pragmatics into the EFL syllabi in Iran in an attempt to bridge the gap that naturally exists between the two cultures on sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic levels. By implication, materials developers may also benefit from these findings and take practical insights for developing instructional materials that reflect the sociopragmatic values and pragmalinguistic strategies associated with particular speech acts.

7. Conclusions

The study aimed to explore the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic variability that existed between American English native speakers' and Iranian EFL learners' production of the speech acts by using the WDCT and the accompanying multidimensional scoring system. The results indicated that in spite of the presence of a similar range of strategies, the Iranian EFL learners differed in several ways from the American native speakers of English. Such differences relate to their choices of speech acts, semantic formulae, sociopragmatic content, and pragmalinguistic forms. The findings related to the directness levels of speech act expressions showed that in a situation which involved minus power (with the speaker being of a lower rank), plus social distance (in which the speaker and the hearer did not know or identify with each other), and

plus degree of imposition (on the part of the hearer to carry out the request), a greater degree of politeness was required to allow the interlocutor to save face. In contrast, when the speech act involved a lower degree of imposition and addressed a person in an equal relationship (e.g. apologizing a friend for a delay), a lesser degree of politeness was required. Thus, the social factors of power, distance, and imposition are thought to make speech acts more demanding in certain situations. In addition, since there were some significant sociocultural differences between the American and the Iranian participants in the assessment of the three variables, some differences appeared between the American and the Iranian participants in their choice of L2 pragmalinguistic strategies. In fact, the findings supported the dynamic interrelationship between language and culture and produced a picture of cross-cultural pragmatic and stylistic variability in terms of English speech act realization patterns of L2 learners and native speakers.

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