

## A Comparative Study of the Implementation of Politeness Strategies among Iranian EFL learners studying MA in Literature, Translation, and Teaching

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**Abstract:** *The notion of politeness is formed by different cultural perceptions. In different situations and contexts, politeness may be interpreted and evaluated differently by various cultures. This study aims at investigating how politeness strategies are utilized in three different fields of English at MA level in Iran including Teaching, Translation, and Literature in order to find out whether the field of study can have an influence on using politeness strategies on the part of learners or not. The theoretical framework employed in the study was that of Brown and Levinson (1978), which has been tested cross-linguistically and proved to be the most useful model in analyzing the pragmatics of politeness in conversation. To achieve these objectives, the related data were collected based on a questionnaire including 12 different role-playing situations (Brown and Levinson, 1978). The qualitative and quantitative analysis revealed that in all of the three groups selected for the purpose of this study, the Risk of the imposition is the most effective factor in eliciting politeness followed by the Power of the addressee over the speaker; the 'Social Distance' came out as the least effective factor. Teaching group used politeness strategies more than the two other groups and the Translation group used politeness strategies less than the two other groups. The findings of the study can be important for EFL teachers because they should also pay attention to teaching cultural aspects as part of the curriculum when teaching a foreign language.*

**Key words:** *Pragmatics, Discourse Analysis, Politeness Strategy*

### 1. Introduction

As the world is changing, there exist so many things which need to be studied and discovered. Therefore, we should pay attention to the changes taking place in the field of applied linguistics as it is taking place in other field. In the last few decades of the 20th century, there have been many linguistic researches so far but their concerns were only with the forms of language systems which are studied and explained apart from their functions in relation to social situations. Furthermore, their attention was more paid to structural theories on which the small units were arranged and combined into the larger ones. Recently, within linguistics, there was a

shift of emphasis from an almost exclusive concern with formal aspects of language (structural linguistics and generative transformational grammar) to a growing interest in language use. Learning a language is not just learning collection of rules and applying them in meaningful utterances or sentences. We need to understand how language is used within the cultural context of its speakers. The study of how language is used in a particular context or situation is the focus of pragmatics. The study of linguistic pragmatics holds for not only linguists but also language teachers and students, since the relevance of pragmatics has become increasingly clear to linguists, which is shown by a number of researches of those such as Austin (1962), Blum-Kulka (1982), Leech (1983), Cohen (1996), Yule (1997) so on and so forth.

Since Brown and Levinson's work was republished in 1987, work on politeness has gone ahead at a rapid pace, so that today it is possible to access many thousands of entries under this heading. Many researchers (Felix-Brasdefer, 2006; Locher, 2006; Ohashi, 2008; Ruzickova, 2007; Vinagre, 2008) have tackled polite behavior in intercultural interactions while others (Al-Zumor, 2006; Béal, 1990; Cordella, 1991; Fukushima, 1996; Lee-Wong, 1996; Salmani-Nodoushan, 2006; Tsuzuki, Takahashi, Patschke & Zhang, 2005; Wierzbicka, 1990, as cited in Farahat, 2009) have investigated polite behavior in different cultures.

In order to contribute to the area of contrastive pragmatics in Iranian EFL context, an attempt was made to do a comparative study on politeness strategies in the speech act of requesting among EFL learners studying at graduate level in Iran. There are two reasons to do so. Firstly, many studies regarding the speech act of request, giving and receiving compliments, promising or addressing terms, etc have been carried out outside of Iran and in other countries whose English learners have different language backgrounds, but little attention is paid to the speech act of requesting among students studying at three fields of English language in Iran including Teaching, Translation, and Literature.

## 1.2. Significance and Purpose of the study

The present study seeks to examine Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness, a theory which has been described by many researchers as the most powerful and influential theory for conducting studies on politeness (Kasper, 1990; Watts, 2003). The study provides further information about the specific politeness strategies employed by Iranian EFL learners at postgraduate level.

The study discusses the concept of request across cultures and concentrates on concepts of speech-threatening act as they are realized by speakers of Iranian EFL learners. It depends on a set of request-related expressions in order to deepen our understanding of the cultural values and traditions of foreign culture. In so doing, the study puts an emphasis on the importance of the concept of request and its connection with polite behavior.

In the light of contrastive pragmatics, this study aims at comparing and contrasting different linguistic politeness strategies in the speech act of requesting of Iranian EFL learners studying English at postgraduate level at three different fields including Teaching as a Foreign Language (TEFL), Translation, and Literature.

### 1.3. Research questions

With a view to achieving the aims of the study, the research questions will be addressed as follows:

1. Do Iranian EFL learners studying English at postgraduate level at three different fields including Teaching as a Foreign Language (TEFL), Translation, and Literature use politeness strategies differently?
2. What are the common problems related to expressing request among Iranian EFL learners studying English at graduate level at three different fields including Teaching as a Foreign Language (TEFL), Translation, and Literature?

## 2. Definition of Politeness

'Politeness' and 'deference' have been used in literature as two alternative forms. In the Webster's Unabridged Dictionary, 'deference' means: (1) a yielding in opinion; submission of judgment to the opinion or judgment of another; (2) courteous regard or respect. 'Politeness' means: (1) elegance of manners; gentility; good breeding; ease and gracefulness of manners; (2) courteousness; (3) smoothness. The term 'politeness' seems to be more commonly used than 'deference' which is not even listed in the Longman Lexicon of Contemporary English.

The Persian term for politeness is 'adab' the only other term used as a synonym is 'Ehteram' which means 'respect'. Both of the two terms are used interchangeably too. Their Persian antonym is 'Biadabi' (lack of politeness).

The notion of politeness is considered to be one of the most disputable facets of human language in the field of pragmatics. This is due to the vary nature of politeness as a cross-cultural phenomenon, varying from one social context to the next. House and Kasper (1981) define politeness as a social value or culture feature that might be called 'urbanity'. It occurs in all civilized societies, even though the social norms relating to what is and what is not considered polite behavior may vary across cultures.

### 2.1. Politeness theory in language

'Politeness' and 'deference' have been used in literature as two alternative forms. In the Webster's Unabridged Dictionary, 'deference' means: (1) a yielding in opinion; submission of judgment to the opinion or judgment of another; (2) courteous regard or respect. 'politeness' means: (1) elegance of manners; gentility; good breeding; ease and gracefulness of manners; (2)

courteousness; (3) smoothness. The term 'politeness' seems to be more commonly used than 'deference' which is not even listed in the Longman Lexicon of Contemporary English.

Different scholars have proposed different definitions for the word "politeness" but the last definition was suggested by Mills (2003). According to him, politeness is the expression of the speakers' intention to mitigate face threats carried by certain face threatening acts toward another.

### **2.2.1. Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness**

Building on Lakoff's work, Brown and Levinson (1978) distinguish two aspects of face: negative and positive face. Their notion of negative face corresponds to Lakoff's defensiveness function, and to her distance strategy: every person's want to be free from imposition and distraction and to have her/his personal prerogatives and territory respected. This is another name for the principle, 'Don't impose'. The notion of positive face corresponds to camaraderie and to the rapport function. It is every person's want (the authors' carefully chosen word) that his or her wants be desirable to, at least some and others. Very exactly expressed, what each person wants is that others want for him what he wants for himself; for example: life, health, honor, a positive self-image.

Positive politeness is simply defined as an effort to meet positive face needs. The phrase "Have a good day," renewed daily, is an act of positive politeness: the speaker wishes for the hearer what the hearer wishes for himself. Negative politeness is defined as an attempt to meet negative face wants, but negative politeness, unlike positive, is designed to redress the imposition that creates the occasion for politeness. On record FTAs are speech acts for which the "speaker's meaning" or intention is unambiguous. An FTA is off record when the speaker's intention is ambiguous and can only be worked out by inference. Because off record FTAs are ambiguous, the speaker cannot be held responsible and any inferred meaning is deniable. For example, if someone says 'Damn, I'm out of cash, I forgot to go to the bank today', he may be intending to get the hearer to lend him some cash, but he cannot be held responsible to have committed himself to that intent.

### **2.3. Studies of politeness strategies**

Since the appearance of Brown and Levinson's (1987) work on cross-cultural politeness phenomena, many cross-cultural pragmatic studies have taken place, aiming at exploring differences in various speech acts. Among the most respected studies is the one done by Béal (1990), who investigated the linguistic behavior of speakers of French and speakers of Australian English. He found that speakers of Australian English and speakers of French used different politeness strategies when formulating requests. This was considered as a major cause of clash between the two groups. Under the general heading of negative politeness, speakers of Australian English and French showed different orientations. While speakers of Australian

English showed a preference for indirectness, speakers of French used a strategy identified by Brown and Levinson as “impersonalize speaker and hearer”, where the speech act is performed by avoiding the pronouns “I” and “you” which directly refer to S and H (p. 190).

Further, cross-cultural differences in using politeness strategies between speakers of Australian English and Chileans were found to be a source of misunderstanding and consequently a source of sociopragmatic failure. According to Cordella (1991), Chileans used positive politeness strategies to perform the speech act of apology. In contrast, speakers of Australian English used negative politeness. It was found that an apology in Spanish is used to strengthen solidarity between interlocutors, whereas, in Australian culture harmony can be achieved by avoiding imposing on the hearer. In Brown and Levinson’s (1987) terms, this is seen as a negative politeness strategy.

Finally, Tsuzuki, Takahashi, Patschke and Zhang (2005) found cultural differences in using politeness strategies between speakers of Chinese and American English. They report that the use of imperative forms to perform requests is more conventionalized in Chinese culture than in American society. For Chinese speakers, imperative forms were considered more polite in all the situations investigated when the social distance between interlocutors was low, but this was not so for speakers of American English. As stated by the researchers, this difference reflects different cultural orientations in terms of politeness.

Regarding the use of politeness strategies in Iranian context, Jalilifar, Hashemian, and Tabatabaee (2011) did a cross-sectional investigation into the request strategies used by Iranian learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and Australian native speakers of English. The sample involved 96 B.A. and M.A. Iranian EFL learners and 10 native speakers of English. Although the results revealed pragmatic development, particularly in the movement from direct to conventionally indirect strategies on the part of the EFL learners, the EFL learners with higher proficiency displayed overuse of indirect type of requesting, whereas the native group was characterized by the more balanced use of this strategy. The lower proficiency EFL learners, on the other hand, overused the most direct strategy type. In terms of the influence of the social variables, the findings of this research revealed that as far as social power is concerned, the EFL learners displayed closer performance to the native speakers. But considering social distance, it seems that the Iranian EFL learners had not acquired sufficient sociopragmatic knowledge to display proper social behavior.

Finally, Rashidi and Sammahnejad (2011) examined the understanding of politeness phenomena in Shiraz, a city in Iran, between native and non-native speakers of Persian. Accordingly, two speech acts namely, request and apology are studied to see the participants’ perception and interpretation of the linguistic actions. These speech acts are selected due to their common occurrence in every day human interaction. A socio-pragmatic approach is used in this study, one which according to Leech (1983) is described as “the sociological interference of

pragmatics” ( p.10). The analysis shows that the English speakers use positive politeness more, while the Persian speaker prefers the negative politeness.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Subjects

75 adults, males and females, ranging in age from 25 to 35 years old participated in this study. They are classified into three groups as follows: Twenty-five EFL learners studying TEFL at MA level, twenty-five EFL learners studying Translation at MA level and twenty-five EFL learners studying Literature at MA level.

#### 3.2. Instrument

One of the most common methods for collecting data for conversational analysis is role-playing situations (Scarcella and Brunak 1981; Blum-Kulka 1982). Therefore, the theoretical framework employed in the study was that of Brown and Levinson (1978), which has been tested cross-linguistically and proved to be the most useful model in analyzing the pragmatics of politeness in conversation. It simply states that speakers may use one of super strategies based on the sum total of weightiness of the risk involved in the imposition of the directive speech act. There are three claimed universal factors that determine the choice of a politeness strategy: social 'distance' between the speakers, the 'power' of the addressee over the speaker, and the weight of the 'risk' involved in the imposition.

#### 3.3. Design of the current experiment

For present study the situations were devised based on the three variables: D, P, and R with their different levels proposed by Brown and Gilman (1989). An attempt was made to elicit two speeches that would match each other in two variables and differ in the third. However, if we take all the statistical possibilities whereby two elements are constant and the third is different at various levels, we will get too many possibilities and that would be impractical for a questionnaire. Therefore, the situations were devised in a way to make pairs match on two variables regardless of their levels (high or low) and differ on the level of the third variable. The theory predicts that in two situations where only one variable of the three (D, P or R) changes from higher to lower or vice versa the politeness value of the request will change accordingly regardless of the levels of the other two constant variables whether they are low, medium or high. The table below will show the types of situations that will be devised at the different levels of High (H) or Low (L) of politeness determinants, Distance (D), Power (P) and Risk (R).

*Table 1. Pairs of situations and their R, P and D levels*

Situation	Risk	Power	Distance
3	L	L	H

4	H	L	H
2	L	H	L
1	H	H	L
5	L	L	H
6	L	H	H
7	L	L	L
8	L	H	L
9	H	L	L
10	H	L	H
11	L	H	L
12	L	H	H

The definition of the various levels for D, P and R would be tentatively suggested as follows:

*Distance:* The level will be assumed to be low if the two persons are close friends or members of the same family or kinsmen or close relatives or colleagues at work, etc. The level will be assumed to be high if the two persons are complete strangers and not familiar with each other.

*Power:* The level of power will be assumed to be low if the addressee is a friend, or colleague or any person who has no obvious control or influence over the speaker. The level will be assumed as high if the addressee is in a position to provide the speaker a service and can withhold it or make it difficult to get, or he/she can hurt or punish if his face is not satisfied (the want to be unimpeded and the want to be approved of in certain respects (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p.58).

*Risk:* The level of risk will be assumed to be low if the requested thing is of the free goods type, such as asking for directions or asking for the time, etc. The level will be assumed to be high if the requested thing will cost the addressee something he/she cannot afford or can cause serious problem or damage, as in requesting a high ranking official to change his bad behavior in public. If the Risk is too high to the degree that the speaker may think that he will get hurt because he is asking too much, then he may not be able to do the FTA (strategy five).

Based on the relative definition of the variables, 15 situations were devised. Two pairs were devised for each of the three politeness determinant with a changing level as High and Low. Thus we have twelve situations in this study.

### 3.4. Data Analysis



First, the coding scheme for politeness was outlined to serve as basis for computing the results at all levels. Then, results were presented for each pair of situations separately to find out the linguistic differences resulting from changes in the politeness determinant between 'high' (H) and 'low' (L) and the influence on politeness level. The type of strategies used across groups and their influence on politeness were also presented and analyzed at the level of each pair.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. Changing the 'Risk' level

#### 4.1.1. Pair one, $D=H$ , $P=L$ constant, situations 4 and 3

This pair has been devised to show the difference in the choice of politeness strategies due to the changing level in the 'Risk' of the imposition on a stranger who presumably has 'Low' power over the speaker. The 'Risk' changes from asking for help in carrying some shopping bags, which needs effort, willingness, and physical strength on the part of the hearer to asking for the time, which is assumed to be of little cost to the hearer.

The above results were analyzed and presented with reference to three groups of subjects including Teaching, Translation, and Literature group.

Table 2. Percentage of each group by strategy in situation 4 and 3

Group	Bald		Redressed		Off-record		No FTA	
	3	4	3	4	3	4	3	4
Teaching	-	-	95	80	-	-	-	18
Translation	-	-	90	80	-	-	-	18
Literature	-	-	85	55	-	-	-	20

Table 2 shows the contrast between the two situations (3 and 4) where (D) and (P) are constant and (R) is changing from (L) in situation 3 to (H) in situation 4. Results show that there aren't any instances of 'bald on record' in both situations. When the speaker feels that the FTA is too risky to make, he/she chooses 'don't do the FTA' strategy as there are no instances in situation 3. In both situations there is not a single instance of an 'off record', which may indicate that the risk is not high enough to elicit such a strategy from any subject. The most preferred strategy for all types of subjects is 'redressed directive'. The number of subjects choosing this strategy ranges between 85% to 95% in situation 3, while it ranges between 55%-80% in situation 4.

The overall result is that all groups used more polite strategies in situation 4 than situation 3.

Further, the frequency of use of different types of expressions as negative and positive strategies in situation 4 and 3 has been indicated in Table 3.



Table 3. Percentage of redress strategies in situation 3 and 4

Negative Politeness		Teaching	Translation	Literature
Model	Sit 3	22	15.6	18.4
	Sit 4	20.2	18	19
Please	Sit 3	27	24.4	26.2
	Sit 4	30	21	22.8
Excuse me	Sit 3	24	24	23.5
	Sit 4	3	4	5.2
Mini risk	Sit 3	0	0	0
	Sit 4	2	3	2.8
Deference	Sit 3	6.4	9.2	8.4
	Sit 4	0	1	2.4
Conditional	Sit 3	0	0	0
	Sit 4	5.5	4	6.2
Incur debt	Sit 3	0	0	0
	Sit 4	15	8	3
Give reasons	Sit 3	4	2	0
	Sit 4	11	6.4	9
Admit impingement	Sit 3	0	0	0
	Sit 4	0	0	0
Total	Sit 3	83.4	75.2	76.5
	Sit 4	86.7	65.4	70.4
Positive Politeness				
Wish Good	Sit 3	16.5	23.5	15.2
	Sit 4	13	9	7.4
In-group Language	Sit 3	0	0	0
	Sit 4	0	0	0
Promise	Sit 3	0	0	0
	Sit 4	0	0	0
Total	Sit 3	16.5	23.5	15.2
	Sit 4	13	9	7.4

By looking at the percentage of negative and positive politeness strategies in situation 3 and 4, we can look at which type is used more than the other, and which group also uses any given type more than other groups. As the results show, there is a tendency to use more of negative than positive politeness strategies in these situations. Further, teaching used more negative strategies in comparison to the two other groups. Regarding positive politeness, teaching group used more in comparison to other groups.

#### 4.1.2. Pair two, $D=L$ , $P=H$ constant: Situation 1 and 2

This pair has been designed to verify the results of pair one. The purpose is to test the effect on politeness level as a result of change in the level of 'Risk'. In situation 1, risks is supposed to be 'High' in criticizing your principal in public for his failure in managing the school; in situation 2, 'Risk' is supposed to be 'Low' in asking your principle for a one-day-leave. Based on this change in risk, while the other two variables are constant, politeness is expected to go higher with high risk and lower with low risk.

Table 4. Percentage of each group by strategy in situation 1 and 2

Group	Bald		Redressed		Off-record		No FTA	
	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2
Teaching	-	-	75	100	-	-	15	-
Translation	-	-	60	95.4	-	-	15	-
Literature	-	-	65	100	-	-	15	-

Table 4 indicates, the difference between situation 1 which has high 'risk' and situation 2 where the 'risk' is low. If politeness goes higher with higher 'risk' in this pair too, then there is more evidence that the predictions of the theory are correct. The two constant variables change in level: 'D' is high and 'P' is low in pair one; while 'D' is low and 'P' is high in pair two.

The distribution of strategies show that in situation 2 neither 'bald' strategy nor 'avoidance strategies' were used among the three groups, which indicates that requesting a leave from a principal is not risky enough to trigger avoidance or would allow for 'bald'. Subjects preferred 'redressed directives' strategy in this situation. In situation 1, 'No FTA' avoidance strategy was used while in situation 2, avoidance strategies were not used at all. This result shows an obvious contrast of effect in changing the level of 'risk' from low to high.

#### 4.2. Changing 'Power' level

##### 4.2.1 Pair one, $D=H$ , $R=L$ constant: Situation 5 and 6

This pair is designed to test the effect of change in the 'power' level, while keeping the other two variables constant. In situation 5, the power of the clerk in the consulate over the speaker is supposed to be low, because it is his duty to give out visa forms. While, the power of the consul is presumably 'high' over the speaker because he can deny the permission for the visa. Therefore, it is expected that the speakers would choose politer strategies with the consul than with the clerk.

Table 5. Percentage of each group by strategy in situation 5 and 6

Group	Bald		Redressed		Off-record		No FTA	
	5	6	5	6	5	6	5	6
Teaching	-	-	90	100	-	10	-	15
Translation	-	-	76	97	-	5	-	5
Literature	-	-	75	96.5	-	5.5	-	10

According to Table 5, avoidance strategies (Off-record or No FTA) were used in situation 6 where the power is high and never used in situation 5 where the power is low. Further, risk is considered low in these two situations where the speaker is asking for something believed to be possible to ask for without the risk of losing face, either in asking for a visa application or appealing for reconsidering the rejection of the visa. The only difference is the 'power' factor which is associated with the consul much more than it is with the clerk. Across groups, the teaching group used strategies of higher politeness than the rest of the groups.

#### 4.2.2. Pair two, D=L, R=R constant: situation 7 and 8

This pair was also designed to verify the effect of change in the level of 'Power' on politeness in pair one. In situation 7a high ranking boss addresses his driver who has 'Low' power over him; whereas in situations 8 the driver is addressing his boss who has 'high' power. It is expected that directives from the driver will be more redressed than directives from the boss who may use bald on record in addressing his driver.

Table 6. Percentage of each group by strategy in situation 7 and 8

Group	Bald		Redressed		Off-record		No FTA	
	7	8	7	8	7	8	7	8
Teaching	15	-	80	70	-	20	-	15
Translation	5	-	70	60	-	15	-	8
Literature	10	-	74	65	-	17	-	9.3

By looking at the above table, we can conclude that 'power' has great influence on choosing expressions when superiors are addressed. And this influence goes higher if is coupled with 'high risk'; the directive may become even impossible to make. The distribution of strategies shows that in #7, avoidance strategies were never used at all. This is what the theory predicts; in a situation where there is no risk and a superior is addressing a subordinate, using 'off record' or 'withholding the directive' is not expected and will look funny if used. In situation 8, 'bald' was never used and subjects used either 'redressed' or 'avoidance' strategies.

Further, group comparison shows that the teaching group is in the highest in politeness in addressing the superior as they were in previous situations. The literature group placed second and the translation group reported the lowest amount of politeness.

### 4.3. Changing 'Distance' level

#### 4.3.1. Pair one: $P=L$ , $R=H$ constant: *SituatioIn 9&10*

This pair was designed to test the effect of change in the level of Distance (D) on politeness level. In situation 9 the addressee is a close friend as opposed to addressing a new neighbor who considered a stranger to the speaker. Thus we have difference in the distance level. It is expected, according to the theory, that politeness should go higher in addressing a new neighbor than it is in addressing a close friend.

Table 7. Percentage of each group by strategy in situation 9 and 10

Group	Bald		Redressed		Off-record		No FTA	
	9	10	9	10	9	10	9	10
Teaching	-	-	95	45	-	-	-	80
Translation	-	-	80	25	-	-	-	65
Literature	-	-	85	30	-	-	-	70

Table 7 shows the results of pair one in testing the influence on politeness of distance accompanied with 'high risk' and 'low power'. 'Bald' and 'off-record' were never used, in either situation. The 'No FTA' was only used in situation 10; but there was a high percentage (situation 10=65 & 80) of 'No FTA' in requesting a new neighbor; in requesting a friend, any case of the 'No FTA' was reported.

Comparing the groups, it can be noticed that the teaching group came out highest of all groups in both situations. Second came the literature group, followed by the translation group.

By considering this example, how the speaker offers anything that the hearer is interested in as collateral to show trust and to guarantee that he will give the money back.

#### 4.3.2 Pair two: $P=H$ , $R=L$ constant: *situation 11 and 12*

This pair was designed to see if the same result of the pair one would obtain. The distance is changing from 'Low' in inviting and old friendly director to 'High' in inviting a new director. But the 'risk' is low here and the power is high; while risk is high and power is low in pair one. It is expected that a directive with a 'High' distance would trigger higher politeness strategies than the one with 'Low' distance.

Table 8. Percentage of each group by strategy in situation 11 and 12

Group	Bald		Redressed		Off-record		No FTA	
	11	12	11	12	11	12	11	12
Teaching	10	-	75	95	-	-	-	-
Translation	5	-	64	75	-	-	3.7	6.3
Literature	5.4	-	70	80	-	-	-	-

Table 8 shows the result of the second pair testing the influence of 'Distance', this time accompanied by 'low risk' and 'high power' on politeness. Results indicated that there is no significant distinction between the situations in this pair because in this pair, the directive is in the interest of the addressee, while in the rest of the situations; it is in the interest of the speaker. As for the distribution of strategies, 'off-record' was never used, in either situation. The 'No FTA' was only used for translation group and 'bald' was only used for the situation 11. However, as in other situations, teaching group used the highest level of redressed strategy, followed by the literature group, and finally the translation group.

#### 4.4. Contrasting politeness strategies across groups

We have examined the claims of Brown and Levinson's theory by looking at the percentages of the choice of each strategy across groups in each pair of situations.

The next step in the analysis will be to look at the choice of strategies in all the situations added together to have an overall picture of what the general trend is in the behavior of each group compared to the other groups. This may help, also, to find out the differences between the three groups including Teaching, Translation, and Literature.

Now, in order to find out the choice of strategies across situations by the various groups, data were analyzed in the following table:

Table 9. Percentage of choice of strategies in all situations together in teaching, translation, and literature group

Group	Bald	Redressed	Off-record	No FTA
Teaching	4.6	80	8.6	12.4
Translation	2.2	55	9.6	10
Literature	3.7	65.5	7.4	11

The above table shows a contrast across groups of the distribution of strategies. As it is clear from this table, Teaching group placed first in using the above-mentioned strategies, followed by Literature group. The Translation group placed last among the other groups.

## 5. Discussion

These results give insight into the ways that how speech act request are used by learners studying English at postgraduate level at three different fields including Teaching as a Foreign Language (TEFL), Translation, and Literature with varying levels of three politeness determinant (P, D and R) from low to high and which strategies are used accordingly. In order to find out which of the three variables is the most effective in bringing politeness up to the highest level, two of variables were kept constant and the third is changed from low to high. As the results show, where only one variable of three (D, P or R) changed from higher to lower or vice versa the politeness value of the request changed accordingly.

By considering the effect of 'Risk' variable, results illustrate when speakers feel FTA is too risky to make, they choose 'don't do the FTA' avoidance strategy which is the most polite or the most preferred strategy is 'redressed directives' when the cost of speech act is high. Since the risk is not high enough 'bald on record' strategy which is the least polite is used and speakers don't use 'off-record' avoidance strategy. Therefore, politeness goes higher with high risk and vice versa and these findings are in line with what theory predicts based on theory of Brown and Levinson (1978).

About considering the effect of change in 'Power' level, results showed where the power was high, more politer strategies namely the avoidance strategies (Off-record or No FTA) were used and 'Bald on record' strategy was never used and when it was low, 'Bald on record' strategy was used. Findings indicate that power has great influence on choosing expressions and its influence goes higher when is accompanied with high level of risk. Therefore Power and Risk have direct relationship with each other. Finally in considering the effect of change in 'Distance' level on politeness, results illustrate that in high distance situations, 'don't do the FTA' avoidance strategy was used or speakers made their request more polite with redressed directives to soften the negative impact of the request while in situations with low distance level this strategy was never used and speakers used the 'bald on record' strategy. Therefore, according to the theory, findings demonstrated that politeness goes higher in addressing to those with high distance like stranger and hence the number of the mitigating devices increases and vice versa.

Therefore, the result of data analysis showed that speakers' linguistic behavior vary according to varying degree of social distance, relative power and the degree of imposition of a certain speech act. In considering results to find out which of the three variables is the most effective in bringing politeness up to the highest level, in all groups 'Risk' is the most effective factor in eliciting politeness which followed by 'Power' of the addressees over the speakers. Further, group comparison shows that teaching group is in the highest politeness in addressing to those with high level of power and translation group is lowest in politeness.

## 6. Conclusion

By considering the results we can come to some conclusions which are applicable to Iranian EFL classroom.

First, there is strong support for the theory of Brown and Levinson's politeness determinants Risk (R), Distance (D), Power (P) and their super strategies; it was demonstrated that if the level of any determinant goes higher politeness goes higher in the direction of higher ranking strategy and vice versa.

Second, it was found that in all of the three groups selected for the purpose of this study, the Risk of the imposition is the most effective factor in eliciting politeness followed by the Power of the addressee over the speaker; the 'Social Distance' came out as the least effective factor. Teaching group used politeness strategies more than the two other groups and the Translation group used politeness strategies less than the two other groups. Evidence from these data supported the claim made by Brown and Levinson that people vary their linguistic behavior according to the degree of social distance, relative power and the degree of imposition of a certain speech act. It was found that interlocutors used different politeness strategies when requesting people of varying social distance.

Speakers were also found to use more redressive devices if the cost of the speech act was high. Speakers were also found to use more redressive devices if a hearer had more power over a speaker. However, the three social variables do not have the same significance when accounting for speakers' linguistic behaviour. It was found that when the social distance is high, the cost of the request is high and hence the number of the mitigating devices increases in order to soften the negative impact of the request. However, when the request is performed by members belonging to the same group, where the social distance is low, it is carried out by using fewer mitigating devices or by the bald-on-record strategy.

Third, in Persian, we can use different variants of 'please' such as *bebakhshid*, *age emkan dare*, *mishe lotfan* but in English there are no equivalents other than 'please'. This may create some problems for learners of English whose L1 is Persian.

### 5.1. Pedagogical Conclusions

As far as some conclusions which can be applied to Iranian EFL context, we can mention some of them as follow:

First, according to the coding system followed in this study, results show that Teaching group has the highest level of politeness followed by Literature group in using almost all of the politeness strategies. On the other hand, the English performance of the Translation group came out as the lowest. We can draw this conclusion that the amount of exposure to English language



and contact with other learners can play a role here. In fact, the Translation group has the lowest amount of exposure to spoken language and contact with other learners while this is not the case for the two other groups. The Teaching group has the highest amount of exposure and the learners of this group have more contact or communication with others.

Second, all groups showed the same tendency to use the strategy of 'Don't do the face threatening act (FTA)'. Through this, we can conclude that all of the EFL learners selected for this study chose 'silence' in high risk situations. However, the Teaching group used more redressed FTAs than the two other groups showing a tendency to use a higher degree of redress instead of using 'silence'.

Third, regarding the use of negative politeness strategies by the EFL learners, each group showed different orientations towards preferring one politeness strategy over another. In general, the Teaching group used more negative strategies than the Literature group, who are better than the Translation group. It should be pointed out that the use of *modals*, *please*, and *Excuse me* were more frequent in comparison to other strategies in all groups.

Finally, it is hoped that research in L2 pragmatics will not only improve our understanding of pragmatic development in speech act realization and of the nature of strategies, but will also enable SLA researchers to incorporate effective methods of teaching pragmatics in EFL classrooms.

## 5.2. Implications for foreign language teaching

The findings of the study can be important for EFL teachers because they should also pay attention to teaching cultural aspects as part of the curriculum when teaching a foreign language. Although learners should do their best to learn the syntactic, semantic, phonological and morphological systems of any language, it is also essential to communicate in a foreign language efficiently. Keeping these purposes in our mind, there are still other aspects that need to be emphasized, such as how the native speakers of a particular language use the language. In other words, when we are not aware of how the native speakers of a particular language use the code of politeness, it may cause some problems in communicating with others, and finally misunderstanding and miscommunication.

One of the reasons that some EFL learners are not inclined to speak in front of others is the fear of losing face because it stands as a barrier, preventing them from engaging in a serious discussion in the classroom. According to Watson (1999) and Greenwood (1997), students' reluctance to participate in a classroom discussion was attributed to the fear of making mistakes and consequently losing face. Therefore, it is highly recommended that teachers should be made aware of the cross-cultural differences in relation to acts that cause loss of face in class because different cultures demonstrate cultural diversity in conceptualizing loss of face and acts that might cause loss of face.

Therefore, it is recommended that the teaching of politeness should be integrated into the teaching of English in an EFL context.

### 5.3. Suggestions for future research

The data collected for this study were taken from the postgraduate groups of EFL learners in Iran. The focus of study was based on written aspect of politeness strategies, other studies can be done on spoken aspect of politeness strategies.

Although the results of this study are consistent with Farahat's (2009) study, where a different type of data was used, further research is needed, comparing the results obtained from this method of data collection with other methods of data collection.

The results of this study were limited to Iranian EFL context. Other studies can be done by comparing the results to American native speakers and ESL learners.

This study was done on postgraduate level of EFL learners, other studies can be done on PhD level of EFL learners to distinguish that if the period of exposure has significant role in cross cultural pragmatics.

The findings of the study revealed significant differences between the request system of Iranian EFL learners in English. Since the request system of any language has a significant role to play in encoding linguistic politeness, it is recommended that an inclusive comparison of the request system of the two languages is necessary as it is expected to contribute a great deal to deepening our understanding of the politeness phenomena in the cultures under investigation.

### 5.4. Limitations of study

Due to the scope of the M.A. thesis, limited time and experience, it is impossible to cover all contrastive pragmatic matters. This study just focuses mainly on comparing the politeness strategies used in the speech act of request among EFL learners studying three different fields including Teaching as a Foreign Language (TEFL), Translation, and Literature basing on the analysis of the data collected from role-playing situations in relation to the three social parameters (P, D and R) in the contexts studied.

As a result, the theoretical frameworks applied to this study are the speech act theory, politeness theory, indirectness and the social factors affecting politeness in interaction. In other words, the study focuses on verbal communication, but other important factors such as non-linguistic factors (facial expression, gestures, eye contact, etc.), paralinguistic factors (intonation, pause, speed of speech, etc.) will not be taken into account

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**Appendix1****Pairs of role-playing discourse situations****Risk of request changing****Situation one (D=medium, P=high, and R=high)**

You are a school teacher. You have noticed that your principal is a bad school manager and the school discipline is getting worse every day. What would you say to request that principal give better attention to the school discipline?

**Situation two (D=medium, P=high, R=low)**

You are a school teacher. You want a leave of absence from your work for one day for a personal reason. What would say to your boss to request that leave?

**Situation three (D=high, P=low, R=low)**

You are on your way to college and you are a bit late. You have left your watch at home. A person (your age) wearing a watch passes by. You want to know what time it is. What would you say to that person?

**Situation four (D=high, P=low, R=high)**

You are carrying several bags full of groceries on your way back home from shopping. You need someone to help you. An unfamiliar person (your age) passes by. What would you say to request that person to carry some of the bags with you?

**Power of hearer changing****Situation five: (D=high, P=low, R=low)**

You want to apply for a visa at a foreign consulate. You have never been there before. What would you say to request the clerk at the front desk to give you an application form?

**Situation six: (D=high, P=high, R=low)**

Your application for a visa to a foreign country has been turned down. If you were given the chance to speak to the consul, what would you say to request him to reconsider your application?

**Situation seven: (D=medium, P=low, R=low)**

You are an important person in a high government position; and you are assigned a driver to your car by virtue of your job. What would you say to that driver to request him to drive you to your office?

**Situation eight: (D=medium, P=high, R=low)**

You work as a driver to an important person in a high government position. What would you say to request him to give you a raise in your salary?

**Distance between speakers changing****Situation nine: (D=low, P=low, R=high)**

You found a house for rent; but you don't have the \$1000 required as a deposit before you can sign the contract. Your salary is due two weeks later. What would you say to request a close friend to lend you that money?

**Situation ten: (D=high, P=low, R=high)**

You found a house for rent; but you don't have the \$1000 required as a deposit before you can sign the contract. Your salary is due two weeks later. What would you say to request a new neighbour to lend you that money?

**Situation eleven: (D=low, P=high, R=low)**

You have worked in a public department under a friendly director for a long time. You are having a big party for an important occasion in your life. What would you say to invite the director to your party?

**Situation twelve: (D=high, P=high, R=low)**

You are a new employee in a public department. You want to start a good relationship with the director. You are having a big party for an important occasion in your life. What would you say to invite the director to your party?

Appendix 2
Response Sheet

Name: Sex: Age: Country: Profession:

What town do you live in?

For how many years have you learnt English?

MA educated of field: Teaching ( ) Translation ( ) Literature ( )

Your family annual income in thousand dollars: less than 15 ( ) 15-25 ( ) 25-40 ( ) 40-60 ( ) 60-80 ( ) more (x)

Situation one:
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Situation two:
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Situation three:
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Situation four:
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Situation five:
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Situation six:
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Situation eight:
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Situation nine:
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Situation ten:
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Situation eleven:
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Situation twelve:
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