Pragmatic awareness of Suggestions: From (Im)Polite Mannerism to Attitudinal Appropriateness

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Abstract

The study seeks to provide a systematic pragmatic analysis of suggestion speech act among Iranian EFL learners. The purposes of the investigation are determining: the application of suggestion semantic formulae, the attitude of appropriateness in terms of confidence in the employment of appropriate supportive moves, polite and impolite mannerism, and the relationship between attitude of appropriateness and mannerism. To this end, an OQPT was administered as a placement test among 60 Iranian EFL learners. These participants along with 10 American native speakers then underwent a suggestion DCT addressing interlocutors with various power statuses (higher, lower, and equal) and social distances (intimate and strange). The DCT also involved attitudinal appropriateness scale and (im)politeness mannerism likert scale. The results indicated variations in the Iranian learners and American speakers' performances in the employment of semantic formulae as well as in attitudinal appropriateness and (im)politeness manner. Moreover, the output revealed a positive relationship between the attitude and mannerism scales.

Keywords: Pragmatic awareness; Iranian EFL learners; Suggestion speech act; Attitudinal appropriateness; (Im)politeness strategies

1. Introduction

Pragmatic competence entails perceiving and producing intended illocutionary forces of the interlocutor's utterances (Fraser, 1978). The competence is widely acknowledged as the appropriate and effective use of language with high regard to contexts. In other words, the competence is a concentration on the use of language forms under the influence of contextual and cultural conventions of a society (Spada & Lightbown, 1999). Consequently, failing to heed the norms of a culture can lead to miscomprehension and miscommunication of the speaker's intention (Tamam & Krauss, 2017; Thomas, 1983).

Certain scholars (e.g., Brown & Levinson, 1987) have subscribed to the belief that the speech patterns are arranged according to the universal principles, while others (e.g., Spencer-Oatey, 2008) believe in the specificity of the principles. Believers in the universality of the speech patterns have consistently argued that speech acts are either inherently face saving or threatening (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Recent literature, however, has offered contradictory findings about the universality of functions and emphasizes that functions are the knowledge of contextually situated patterns.Expanding the issue, it is the consideration of appropriate application of speech acts in relation to the consideration of politeness and impoliteness (hereafter referred to as (im)politeness) strategies. Geyer (2008) states that communication is the constant adjustment of face or self-image to discursive situations.

It has been comprehensively suggested that politeness is "a means of minimizing confrontation in discourse- both the possibility of confrontation occurring at all, and the possibility that a confrontation will be perceived as threatening" (Lakoff, 1989, p.102). To put it differently, it is labeled as a behavior not violating and imposing others' boundaries. The other side of the continuum is impoliteness which damages the balance (Kasper, 1990). The high-priority point is that (im)politeness judgments do not occur in vacuum (Fauzia, Ibrahim, & Marosc; 2014) but they are the constant consideration of the application of strategies and speech acts by way of cross-cultural norms. Lack of awareness of the issues endangers communication success. The fact is particularly substantial for foreign language learners, who may encounter cross-linguistic and cross-cultural breakdowns during communication action process.

Suggestion as a direct speech act is admitted as an intricate supportive move particularly respecting the complexities in patterns across different cultures. This study has focused on examining an account of suggestion formula among Iranian EFL learners and American

native speakers to find the similarities and discrepancies of supportive moves as well as to explore the degree to which Iranian EFL learners' patterns would match to the target language patterns. The second purpose of the study has been to organize a confidence test, which scrutinizes the learners' assurance in making appropriate responses. The third purpose has been to examine the correspondence between the Americans and the EFL learners' (im)politeness strategies. Finally, any possible attitudinal appropriateness association with (im)politeness strategies are sought out.

2. Literature Review

Communicative competence is the language knowledge which is internalized; it covers grammatical and contextual rules (Hymes, 1972). Canale (1983) expands the model and adds grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence. Although there is still an attempt to reach a consensus about the branches, the overall components are not apparently distinct. The central theme is that successful language learning is an appropriate compound of grammatical and sociolinguistic competence (Paulston, 1974). In point of fact, language knowledge is not confined to the grammatical competence but it also involves pragmatic competence. Thomas (1983) identifies that while the former is the abstract knowledge of phonology, syntax, semantics, etc. the latter is the use of the abstract knowledge with regard to the contexts.

One of the most significant current discussions in appropriate interaction and effective learning is pragmatic knowledge. It is "the study of the use of language in communication, particularly the relationship between sentences and the contexts and situations in which they are used" (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, p. 449). Thus, it entails the connection of utterances in situations (Davies, 1989). Yamanashi (2001) presents a scale of conventionality for pragmatic forces, which reveals the relationship between speech act constructions and the degree of conventionality of pragmatic forces. The scale involves two types of forces: conventional pragmatic force (CPF) and nonconventional pragmatic force (NPF); the former is context-independent, whereas the latter is context-dependent. O'Driscoll (2013) mentions language and contexts are not two separate phenomena but linguistic and communicative behaviors are integrated.

Communicative behavior is the conceptual process of transferring, sending, and receiving messages which involves coding and decoding pieces of information (Berlo, 1960).

The behavior embodies mental states and speech acts so it is the state of obvious that communication action is dynamic and discursive. More explicitly, meaning making in speech acts, a subcategory of pragmatics, is not inherently determined function but it is built during interaction.

In order to be successful in speech acts application, sociocultural and sociolinguistic knowledge are vital prerequisites before, during, and after the interaction (Martinez-Flor & Uso-Juan, 2006). While the former is a focus on the appropriate use of speech acts, the latter is a focus on the linguistic knowledge of them. For a native language, linguistic and pragmatic competences interweave along with each other; however, L2 learners often formulate grammatically correct sentences, but they fail to function and communicate appropriately across contexts. Thus, the overall concentration of the studies is either on natives' or on non-natives' recognition and production of speech acts (Felix-Brasdefer, 2008).

Overall, failing to consider the uniqueness of contextual and cultural norms, interlocutors may face communication breakdown and intercultural miscommunication. Isurin, Furman, and White (2015) find that communication failure "often leads to broken relationships, hurt feelings, culture shock, and diplomatic failure" (p.38). Concisely, it follows damages and threats to the interlocutors' self-image or face. The concept of face incorporates in (im)politeness strategies as linguistic phenomena and/or social interactions. Holmes (1995) labels politeness as a behavior not violating and imposing others' boundaries. In contrast, "impoliteness comes about when: (1) the speaker communicates face-attack intentionally, or (2) the hearer perceives and/or constructs behavior as intentionally face-attacking, or a combination of (1) and (2)" (Culpeper, 2005, p.38).

The aforementioned literature puts emphasis on the requisite attention to unstable features of occasions and cross-cultural variations. As an example, Matsumoto (1988) cites that a Japanese constantly defines his or her identity in relation to others' statuses; this is an evidence of cultural specificity. In another examination, Ting-Toomey and Kurogi (1998) pinpoint I-identity and We-identity and Spencer-Oatey (2008) clarifies the issues that the consideration of face may be as individual or as group. At the heart of the definitions and instances is that messages are not intrinsically (im)polite but participants co-construct the meaning through conversation (Mills, 2002).

Generally, the growing body of evidence supports the significance of variations on western and eastern cultural conventions. The statement necessitates the enhancement of

speech patterns and (im)politeness strategies awareness. Koutlaki (2002) listed three reasons in offer and expression of gratitude speech acts examination which differentiated Iranians' notion of face from Americans'. They were ritual politeness (ta'arof), pride (sˇaxsiat), and honour (ehteram). The results of records, field notes, and interviews revealed that some of the face threatening and face enhancing norms were classified in English and Persian differently. Afghari and Kaviani (2005) drew our attention to the prominence of Brown and Levinson's (1987) social factors in Persian. The authors found that Iranians noticed power and social distance during apologizing.

Sharifian (2008) mentioned modesty (shekasteh-nafsi) as an example of Persian speakers' personality feature which affected on their compliment response patterns in English as their L2. In their major study, Salmani-Nodoushan and Allami (2011) identified types of supportive moves which were applied by Persian speakers who used internal and external moves to negotiate their public self-image. In a cross-linguistic study, Pishghadam and Rasouli (2011) evaluated persuasive strategies in Persian and English. The responses to the DCT revealed the existence of some differences and similarities between the languages which resulted in providing some solutions for the failures that English language learners face during communication and using their pragmatic knowledge.

A number of research studies investigating speech acts have already been carried out on requests, apologies, refusals, and compliments (e.g., Allami & Naeimi, 2010; Kuhi & Jadidi, 2012), but there is still insufficient research into suggestions.

The present study is limited to explaining suggestions, a category of speech acts which are frequent but less discussed compared with others. It is a direct speech act with the purpose of making recommendations to the hearer. The function is beneficial since leave no force on the hearer to accept the speaker's suggestion (Verschueren, 1984). In an in-depth study, Jiang defines suggestion through three key features:

- mentions an idea, possible plan or action for other people to consider; or
- offers an opinion about what other people should do or how they should act in a particular situation; and
- believes that the action indicated is in the best interest of the hearer, or is desirable for the hearer to do (Jiang, 2006, p.41).

The existing literature on speech acts shows the tendency to focus on examining EFL learners' awareness of speech acts through DCT, but there has been no attention to the

attitude and confidence tests in the semantic formulae. Besides, several studies (e.g., Kuhi & Jadidi, 2012) have explored production of politeness strategies, but there is still insufficient data for impoliteness strategies. So far DCT method has only been applied to elicit politeness strategies; however, there has been little attention to likert scale test.

To remedy these problems, this study has focused on pragmatic awareness in expressing suggestion speech act. The objectives of this research are to determine; firstly, Iranian EFL learners' pragmatic awareness of suggestion semantic formulae; secondly, similarities and differences in suggestion speech act production between the two groups of the learners and American native speakers; thirdly, the participants' suggestion patterns based on Jiang' (2006) coding scheme; fourthly, the learners' attitudinal ratings of their suggestion structures in terms of appropriateness; and finally, the learners' awareness of (im)politeness strategies in comparison with the values of native-like strategies.

The theoretical framework of the study in eliciting suggestion supportive moves is based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) variables of power and social distance. In parsing supportive moves, Jiang's (2006) codification scheme is taken into consideration. The study also draws on Mills' (2003) belief that politeness and impoliteness are not two opposing terms but they are set on a continuum. The present study seeks out to find answers to the following questions:

1. To what extent are Iranian EFL learners aware of suggestion semantic formulae in English?
2. To what extent are Iranian EFL learners confident of the appropriateness of the suggestion supportive moves?
3. To what extent are Iranian EFL learners aware of (im)politeness strategies in suggestion semantic formulae?
4. What is the relationship between attitude of appropriateness and mannerism of (im)politeness strategies in suggestion semantic formulae?

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

Two groups of participants took part in the study, namely Iranians and Americans. The first group included 60 intermediate Iranian EFL learners at universities and language institutes in Shiraz, Iran. More than one-half of the sample participants were female (75%)

and the rest (25%) were male. Based on the demographic information, the learners' age ranged from 23 to 45 years. Besides, they had no experience of living in an English country so they were homogenous in the case that they were not exposed to foreign cultures. The second group was 10 American speakers of English, 7 females and 3 males, who were homogenous in terms of their native language (i.e. English). Their age ranged from 20 to 52 years and they were selected from M.Sc. and Ph.D. educational levels. The major reason for recruiting Americans to fill the DCT was eliciting valid and standard forms of suggestion patterns.

3.2. Instruments

3.2.1. Instruments for Iranian EFL Learners

The purpose of the study called for carrying out two sets of instruments for Iranian EFL learners: OQPT and DCT. First, all of the learners went through the second version of OQPT before any other test in order to check their English language proficiency level and place them into the appropriate level. The test included 60 items, which covered vocabulary and grammar questions.

Then a DCT was conducted as the most principal way of data-collection tool particularly in pragmatics-based investigations (Kasper, 2000). The open-ended DCT had 12 scenarios and it was previously used by Ahmadi et al. (2014). The scenarios provided the learners with an opportunity to establish their sociopragmatic knowledge of the contextual factors in line with the appropriate use of forms which were representatives of their target language knowledge of suggestion semantic formulae. Since the purpose was to scrutinize the learners' knowledge of suggestion supportive moves, the tasks addressed the intended speech act to the interlocutors with different powers (high, equal, and low) and social distances (intimate and strange).

The specific feature of the study was to design attitudinal appropriateness scaleas as well as an (im)polite mannerism scale. The scales were presented at the end of each scenario in order to find the responses to the second, third, and fourth research questions. The attitude scale was set to examine the learners' confidence in the appropriateness of their answers with regard to the social variables of the scenarios provided. It included five ranks- 0%, 25%, 50%, 75%, and 100%. The noticeable point was that based on Cronbach's alpha the reliability of the scale was high (r= .795).

Next, to satisfy the objectives of the research, the determination of the degree of (im)politeness mannerism played an important role. So a five-scale (im)politeness likert scale test (0%-20%, 20%-40%, 40%-60%, 60%-80%, & 80%-100%) was established to evaluate the learners' consideration for the mannerism of their supportive moves against their native speakers' counterparts. Setting a/an (im)politeness scale is based on Mills' (2003) idea. She moves away from fixed classification of (im)politeness strategies and adopts a continuum. It should be mentioned that the reliability of the test was high (r= .8).

3.2.2. Instruments for American Native Speakers

This study falls within applied research whose ultimate purpose is comparing and contrasting Iranian EFL learners' responses with American native speakers'. To meet it, the DCT, was mailed to Americans. The content and arrangement of the native speakers' scenarios were similar to that of the EFL learners'; however, the differences were in demographics and attitude measure test, the second part of the discourse test. In fact, the DCT included two main parts: suggestion scenarios and (im)politeness strategies. A sample of the question is:

You meet one of your English teachers in a bookstore. He/she is considering buying an expensive book about English vocabulary learning. However, you have seen the book in another bookstore at a lower price. What would you suggest to your teacher?

You: ………………………………………………………………………………

How polite do you think your response is?

0%-20%	20%- 40%	40%- 60%	60%- 80%	80%-100%

3.3. Procedures

The OQPT answer sheets were collected by the administrator of the test after 30 minutes. The scores were analyzed based on pre-determined cut-scores. One point was allocated to each question and the total correct answer was calculated out of 60. The study regarded the scores which were ranged from 30 to 47 as the intermediate level. Afterwards the DCT was distributed among the learners. The participants were requested to finish the test after 15-20 minutes and provide one answer for each scenario and mark the intended percentage of confidence and mannerismscales in the box provided. To have a sound analysis of the responses, the data were codified based on Jiang's (2006) rationale. One point was

considered for each supportive move so the total frequencies obtained by the codified responses from the Iranians were 720 and from the Americans were 120. The frequencies provided the possibility of entering them into SPSS software for the following analyses.

4. Results

Considering the purposes, the study aimed to identify success in pragmatic domain and to report the similarities and differences in frequencies of suggestion patterns among the Iranian EFL learners and the American native speakers. The aims called for applying appropriate statistical methods. To provide the possibility of comparison between the groups, the frequencies were converted into percentages. First, chi-square method was administered with the two categorical variables of groups and move types and the continuous variable of percentages. The Crosstabulation table (Table 1) shows the results obtained from the preliminary analysis of the variables.

Table 1.

*Crosstabulation Table Group * Suggestion Formulae*

						Formulae					
			Let's	Modal	Wh-question	Conditional	Performative	Pseudo cleft	To clause	Yes-no question	Imperative	Total
Group	Iranian learners	Count	2	14	7	28	3	0	8	10	28	100
		Expected Count	14.4	19.4	11.9	18.4	2.5	4.0	5.5	5.0	18.9	100.0
		% within Group	2.0%	14.0%	7.0%	28.0%	3.0%	.0%	8.0%	10.0%	28.0%	100.0%
		% within Formulae	6.9%	35.9%	29.2%	75.7%	60.0%	.0%	72.7%	100.0%	73.7%	49.8%
		% of Total	1.0%	7.0%	3.5%	13.9%	1.5%	.0%	4.0%	5.0%	13.9%	49.8%
	American speakers	Count	27	25	17	9	2	8	3	0	10	101
		Expected Count	14.6	19.6	12.1	18.6	2.5	4.0	5.5	5.0	19.1	101.0
		% within Group	26.7%	24.8%	16.8%	8.9%	2.0%	7.9%	3.0%	.0%	9.9%	100.0%
		% within Formulae	93.1%	64.1%	70.8%	24.3%	40.0%	100.0%	27.3%	.0%	26.3%	50.2%
		% of Total	13.4%	12.4%	8.5%	4.5%	1.0%	4.0%	1.5%	.0%	5.0%	50.2%
Total		Count	29	39	24	37	5	8	11	10	38	201
		Expected Count	29.0	39.0	24.0	37.0	5.0	8.0	11.0	10.0	38.0	201.0
		% within Group	14.4%	19.4%	11.9%	18.4%	2.5%	4.0%	5.5%	5.0%	18.9%	100.0%
		% within Formulae	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	14.4%	19.4%	11.9%	18.4%	2.5%	4.0%	5.5%	5.0%	18.9%	100.0%

The table organizes the percentage of each formula between the groups. The output presented that the learners employed *imperative* (P= 28%), *conditional* (P= 28%), and *modal* (P= 14%) as the most frequent strategies, whereas the native speakers used *let's* (P= 26.7%), *modal* (P= 24.8%), and *wh-question* (P= 16.8%) as the most common strategies. On the contrary, the lowest % for the learners belonged to *pseudo cleft* (P= 0%), *let's* (P= 2%), and *performative* (P= 3%) and for the natives belonged to *yes-no question* (P= 0%), *performative* (P= 2%), and *to-clause* (P= 3%).

The output was quite revealing in several ways. First, the learners had similar performances in the use of imperative and conditional. The prominent feature of conditional is the subordinator *if* and the formula puts a possibility and choice to make the recommendation more polite (Jiang, 2006). Ignoring the consideration of solidarity, the author testifies the prevalence of the strategy more among the high power tellers towards low power hearers.

Second, the comparison between the groups presented that modal was set as one of the most common strategies. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) suggest that modal takes various social functions such as "expressing politeness or indirectness when making requests, giving advice, or granting permission" with respect to "the speaker's degree of authority or the urgency of the advice" (as cited in Jiang, 2006, p. 44).

Third, the most significant difference was seen in the use of the highest move among the groups. While *let's* was the most common formula among the Americans (P= 26.7%), it was one of the least common strategy among the Iranians (2%). *Let's* is a direct move and it is known as a joint effort by the speaker and hearer. Jiang (2006) adds that via this supportive move, the authoritative manner shift towards collaborative behavior. However, it sometimes has an indirect meaning, 'quasi-imperative', and the addressee is just the hearer (p.44).

Fourth, one of the least frequent strategies between the groups was *performative*. The formula is more seen in recommending assertive suggestions from the speaker with more social dominance to the hearer with lower power (Jiang, 2006).

Fifth, the noteworthy point was the absence of *pseudo cleft* or *wh-cleft* and *yes-no question* among the Iranians and Americans respectively. Biber et al. (1999) state that "the functions of the wh-cleft construction include giving the speaker thinking time, emphasizing the content, and delaying unpleasant information" (as cited in Jiang, 2006, p. 46).

Furthermore, from the data in the following table (Table 2), it is apparent that the difference between the groups is significant (p= .0001) with a large effect size (Crammar's V= .580).

Table 2.

Chi-square Test table for Suggestion Speech Act

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	67.573a	8	.000
Likelihood Ratio	79.713	8	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	34.172	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	201		

a. 5 cells (27.8%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.49.

Accordingly, the report is [x^2 (8) = 67.573, p$\leq$ 0.05], Cramar's V value (.580) and Pearson chi-square value (p= .0001). It indicated that group was effective in the use of semantic formulae; furthermore, based on Cohen's (1988) guideline the effect size was large. To compare the mean scores of Iranian EFL learners with American native speakers' attitude of appropriateness and mannerism of (im)politeness, t-tests were conducted. An examination of data is presented in the table (Table 3) below.

Table 3.

Group Statistics of Attitude of Appropriateness

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Total appropriateness	Iranian learners	60	68.1250	10.71466	1.38326
	American speakers	10	1.0000E2	.00000	.00000

Based on the table, the output indicates that the Americans (M= 1, SD= .000) outperforme the Iranians (M= 68.125, SD= 10.714). The next table (Table 4) indicates the degree of difference.

Table 4.

Independent Samples test of Attitude of Appropriateness

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Total Appropriateness	Equal variances assumed	11.390	.001	-9.350	68	.000	-31.87500	3.40897	-38.67750	-25.07250
	Equal variances not assumed			-23.043	59.000	.000	-31.87500	1.38326	-34.64289	-29.10711

Based on Table 4, the difference between the groups turned out to be statistically significant, (t= 23.043, p= .001, df= 59) and the magnitude of difference in the means was (eta squared= 0.038). The mean difference between the two groups (-31.875) showed that the natives outperformed the non-natives. The value under the Sig. (2-tailed) appeared to be significant (p≤ .05); it meant that the mean difference between the groups was significant. Although based on the eta squared value (0.038), the magnitude of difference was small (Cohen, 1988). Then, Table 5 shows the output of (im)politeness likert scale test.

Table 5.

Group Statistics of (im)politeness Mannerism

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Total (Im)politeness	Iranian learners	60	3.7750	.51308	.06624
	American speakers	10	4.2250	.42862	.13554

Based on Table 5, the Americans' mean score (M= 4.225, SD= .428) is higher than the Iranians' (M= 3.775, SD= .513). The table below (Table 6) illustrates the detailed characteristics of the difference.

Table 6.

Independent samples test of (im)politeness mannerism

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Total (im)politeness	Equal variances assumed	.145	.705	-2.621	68	.011	-.45000	.17171	-.79264	-.10736
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.983	13.693	.010	-.45000	.15086	-.77425	-.12575

The output of the data on (im)politeness manner was, (t= 2.621, p= .705, df= 68) and the magnitude of difference in the means was (eta squared= .035). The mean difference (-.45) showed that the natives' (im)politeness percentages were higher than the non-natives' and the two groups were not significantly different from each other (p≥ .05). Besides, based on the effect size value (eta squared= .035) the magnitude of difference was small. The last step was conducting a Pearson correlation coefficient method in order to find the answer to the fourth research question, degree of relation between the percentages of confidence and mannerism tests. The data are presented in the following table (Table 7).

Table 7.

Correlation between appropriateness and (im)politeness

		Appropriateness- total	(Im)politeness- total
Appropriateness	Pearson Correlation	1	.607**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	70	70
(Im)politeness	Pearson Correlation	.607**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	70	70

Table 7.

Correlation between appropriateness and (im)politeness

		Appropriateness- total	(Im)politeness- total
Appropriateness	Pearson Correlation	1	.607**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	70	70
(Im)politeness	Pearson Correlation	.607**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	70	70

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The preliminary analyses evidenced there were no violations of the normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity assumptions. The table indicates there is a positive correlation between the two variables, (r= .607, n= 70, p= .0001) with the effect size of .368. The output reported that the direction of the association was positive. Furthermore, it presents that the strength of the relationship was large (Cohen, 1988). The correlation coefficient value was (r= .607) and the significance value was <0.01. The data reveals that there is a positive strong relationship between the two variables. The positive association indicates that the higher thepercentages of the participants' confidence in the DCT were, the higher their mannerism scores would be.

5. Discussion

The study gives an account of similarities and differences in suggestion patterns between American native speakers and Iranian EFL learners. It aimed to identify: (1) the extent to which the learners' suggestion patterns would match those of the natives' based on Jiang's (2006) codification scheme; (2) the learners' confidence in attitudinal appropriateness test; (3) the learners' (im)politeness mannerism against the natives'; (4) the degree of relationship between attitude and mannerism in pragmatic awareness.

The most striking results emerge from analyzing the suggestion semantic formulae. A summary of the responses indicates traces of variations between the groups' suggestion patterns:

Iranian EFL learners' suggestion supportive moves: *Conditional* and *Imperative* *>Modal >Yes-no question>To-clause>Wh-question>Perforamative>Let's>Pseudo cleft*

American native speakers' suggestion supportive moves: *Let's>Modal >Wh-question>Imperative>Conditional>Pseudo cleft>To- clause>Performative>Yes-no question*

It is interesting to note that in two cases of this study, *modal* and *performative*, which are evidenced as one of the most and least frequently occurring constructions respectively, the learners and the natives have approximately similar performances. Although the summary presents similarity, the inferential statistics evidence a wide diversity of percentages. In other words, in response to the first question, this study finds that in terms of frequency of suggestion patterns, there are similarities and differences among the Iranian EFL learners and American native speakers. The overall analysis indicates that differences in pragmatic awareness is significant at the $p = .0001$ level.

In terms of content analysis, it is apparent from the answers that the learners inclined towards the application of indirect strategies. This result may be explained by the fact that suggestion is a face-threatening speech act (Brown & Levinson, 1987) and the learners are aware of the matter. It is pertinent to compare this result with that found by Allami and Naeimi (2010) for refusal speech act. They state that Iranian EFL learners are more implicit in refusing an offer than Americans.

This finding corroborates the ideas of Pishghadam and Sharafadini (2011), who conduct a contrastive analysis and detected similarities and differences between English and Persian culture. They analyzed the research data by percentages and suggested the existence of variations in most of the suggestion formulae. The results of the current research are also consistent with Ahmadi et al.'s (2014) who find that *imperative*, *conditional*, and *modal* are the most frequent strategies among different proficiency levels.

It seems that the results obtained are due to the learners' insufficient pragmatic knowledge of the target language. This suggests that language learning without having appropriate sociolinguistic and sociocultural knowledge is inadequate. As Spencer-Oatey (2008) suggests developing cultural awareness is of prime necessity in cross-cultural realization. As such, in order to prevent pragmatic failure, direct teaching of speech acts is recommended (e.g., Eslami-Rasekh & Mardani, 2010).

A possible explanation for variations in results may be attributed to the transfer process. In this case, in order to fill the gap of knowledge, learners incline into the previously acquired

norms in handling new situations, but they ignore the fact that their answers do not linguistically and culturally fit the target context. With regard to the cross-cultural differences, Scollon and Scollon (2001) state that while Iranians believe in hierarchy of power, Americans believe in equality. In other words, as Shang-chao (2008) points out "the western society appreciates egalitarianism and assertiveness in contrast to non-egalitarian eastern society who value hierarchical structure and group harmony" (as cited in Pishghadam and Sharafadini, 2011, p. 235). The statements are supportable based on the evidence found in the current study.

In response to the second question, strong evidence of difference is found when the Iranian EFL learners' responses are compared with the Americans'. The data is revealing in a way that, the learners are not confident of the application of appropriate semantic formulae with regard to the contextual variables. The result obtained for this question is a justification to the learners' poor performance in the first question. However, the findings of the current study do not support Kuhi and Jadidi's (2012) research, who find that Iranian EFL learners are aware of the correct application of patterns.

The third question of the study was set out to assess the learners' (im)politeness mannerism in the production of suggestion speech act. It is somewhat surprising that in spite of the dissimilarities that are affirmed through the data, the difference is not significant at the $p \leq 0.05$ level. Apparently, they are aware of the correct (im)politeness mannerism in response to the interlocutors with various social statuses. A possible explanation for this might be the establishment of a convention like honour (ehteram) in Iranian society (Koutlaki, 2002). Based on the norm, Iranians intrinsically care for the hierarchy of social variables - social distance, power, and imposition- during daily interaction with interlocutors.

Furthermore, it is encouraging to relate this finding with that which found by Koutlaki (2002) who evidenced the prevalence of ritual politeness (ta'arof) among Iranians. She states that this strategy requires employment of several mitigating softening devices to preserve the hearers' face. The learners may benefit from pragmatic transfer of ritual politeness (ta'arof) to the English language. During completing the discourse test, the norm reminds them to be continuously aware of the contextual factors. Explicating the process of transfer is beyond the scope of the study.

The fourth question was designed to determine the possible relationships between attitude of appropriateness and mannerism of (im)politeness. The result indicates there is a

large positive association between the speakers' attitude and mannerism. In other words, the participants who were more assure of the appropriateness of their responses, also marked higher percentages in the mannerismism test. When the interlocutors are more confident of the correctness of their performance in an authentic situation, they are more considerate of their mannerism in terms of (im)politeness strategies.

6. Conclusions

The findings provid insights into Iranian EFL learners' pragmatic awareness in stating suggestion speech act, confidence in employing appropriate supportive moves, mannerism in applying (im)politeness strategies. A population of 60 intermediate Iranian EFL learners and 10 American native speakers participated in the study. The OQPT was administered to check the learners' proficiency level. Then, the 12-item DCT which was designed based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) social variables distributed among the participants. The tasks were codified according to Jiang's (2006) coding scheme. In addition to the suggestion scenarios, the DCT also encompassed attitudinal appropriateness and (im)polite mannerism test. The tests intended to explore to what extent the learners' attitude and mannerism would match the natives' values.

Lack of sufficient pragmatic awareness in proposing suggestions were found among the Iranian EFL learners by the cause of differences which were observed in comparison with the American native speakers' answers. The finding was in support of Pishghadam and Sharafadini (2011) and Ahmadi et al.'s (2014) studies. In conclusion, the importance of pragmatic awareness was clearly supported by the current findings and more strikingly the results underscored that the perception and production of speech acts were cross-culturally various (Bardovi-Harling, 2001).

The findings of DCT were in line with the learners' poor performance in attitudinal appropriateness test. The confidence test gave an account of the reason for the variations in suggestion supportive moves. In conclusion, the finding would be a guarantee to the idea that the learners' lack of confidence was a sign of their insufficient pragmatic awareness. On the other hand, the test of mannerism reported that the Americas outperformed the learners; however, the difference was insignificant. In fact, it suggested that the learners were not unaware of the mannerism of their responses in terms of (im)politeness strategies. Next, the

result indicated the existence of a positive relationship between appropriateness and mannerism.

It is worthwhile to conclude the study with Taguchi's (2015) statement that pragmatics emphasizes a shift in perspective which is beyond the traditional context-free and cause-effect relationships, instead, the focus is on reciprocal relationships in situations. Accordingly, an implication is that pragmatic awareness underpins speech acts success and (im)politeness advancement. The pedagogical implication is exposing the learners to authentic and contextual input and tasks to make them conscious of when, why, and how to use the language knowledge appropriately and effectively.

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