



**Research Article**

# Investigating Iranian Male and Female EFL Instructors’ Techniques for Teaching Interlanguage Pragmatics

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## Introduction

A significant problem that usually occurs during communication among foreign/second language users with native/non-native speakers is

cross- cultural misunderstanding which can be due to their lack of pragmatic awareness, referring to be aware of speakers’ meaning rather than word meaning, to be reflective and to be aware of explicit

knowledge about pragmatics. Thus, it includes awareness of the rules and conventions in a language for speaking appropriately in communicative situations (Bardovi-Harlig, 2020; Rabab'ah & Belgrimet, 2020; Rashidi & Ramezani, 2013). In other words, a language user needs more than grammatical and semantic knowledge to be able to suit themselves to successful international communication (Boonkit, 2010; Rashidi & Ramezani, 2013; Szabóné Papp, 2009).

Several researchers referred to the concept of pragmatic competence as the study of meaning based on different speech situations clinching the prominence of pragmatics awareness in second or foreign language teaching and learning process since learners enjoy the benefits of having appropriate communication through this awareness (Fraser, 2010; Hafez & Memari, 2022; Petrovska 2010; Rabab'ah & Belgrimet, 2020; Shokouhi, 2016).

Pragmatic instruction has often been ignored in most traditional language classrooms. Iranian language learners are not an exception, and most of them face interpersonal problems during their communication with native speakers (Noroozi, 2012; Rueda, 2006; Sanchez Hernandez & Barón, 2021). The reason for it is that they are bound to the context of a classroom in which their instructor is with similar cultural background, and they do not have enough opportunities for interaction with native speakers. This lack of interaction with native speakers can be the main reason for their communication breakdown which has led the language instructors and researchers to involve teaching interlanguage pragmatics in the context of language teaching (Bardovi-Harlig, 2020; Noroozi, 2012; Rabab'ah & Belgrimet, 2020; Rueda, 2006).

Although some scholars have cast out on the teachability of interlanguage pragmatics, there is plenty of evidence showing the positive effects of teaching interlanguage pragmatics (Alcón Soler, 2005; Bardovi-Harlig, 2020; Bacelar da Silva, 2003; Cohen, 2008). The literature suggests that if language learners are left to learn pragmatic competence without any instruction, it is rarely possible to learn them, or it may take too much time to have adequate comprehension of them (Jianda, 2006; Sanchez Hernandez & Barón, 2021; Tan & Farashaiyan, 2016).

Proving the importance of interlanguage pragmatics instruction, second language acquisition researchers and instructors have attempted to introduce the most effective teaching approaches and techniques to develop EFL learners' pragmatic competence since pragmatics awareness is a requirement for having a comprehensible interaction among foreigners. As different types of approaches (implicit, explicit, inductive, deductive) and techniques (e.g., awareness raising and communicative practice) for teaching interlanguage pragmatics were documented in a number of studies (Tan & Farashaiyan, 2016; Muthusamy & Farashaiyan, 2016) figuring out the most appropriate pragmatics instruction approaches and techniques is considered as a significant part of any teaching interlanguage pragmatics (Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; Muthusamy & Farashaiyan, 2016).

Despite the emergence of different techniques for interlanguage pragmatics instruction, teachers have incompatible preferences for selecting some techniques. To uncover the possible reasons for their differential instructional decisions, researchers need to take some teacher-related factors such as teacher's gender into account. This research fills a gap in the literature of interlanguage pragmatics instruction as it examines the role of teachers' gender in selecting techniques for their interlanguage pragmatics instruction. A bulk of research has been carried out on the issue of pragmatics and interlanguage pragmatics instruction (Alcón Soler, 2005; Bardovi-Harlig, 2020; Sanchez Hernandez & Barón, 2021; Szabóné Papp, 2009) and some literature exists on pragmatic development (Alemi & Haeri, 2020; Bacelar da Silva, 2003; Chidinman Chinenye & Unachukwu, 2021; Jernigan, 2012).

However, to the researchers' best knowledge, the study of the techniques applied by male and female teachers to teach interlanguage pragmatics have remained underexplored. This study aims to scrutinize the techniques each gender of EFL teachers applies in teaching pragmatics to fill a part of this gap in the literature.

## Literature Review

Concentrating on pragmatic competence is significant since knowledge of pragmatics is essential for having appropriate communication,

particularly in foreign languages (Alemi & Haeri, 2020; Hafez & Memari, 2022; Halenko & Jones, 2011; Jianda, 2006; Shokouhi, 2016). Language learners view pragmatics as a crucial human language skill for communicating with foreigners (Cohen, 2017). Thus, most of them ask their language teachers how they can express themselves on different topics appropriately. In reality, knowing pragmatics is not a matter of preference but a requirement since misinterpretations and misunderstandings can ruin communication events (González-Lloret, 2019; Kasper & Rose, 2002).

Regarding the second language context, interlanguage pragmatics is a concept which refers to L2 learners' knowledge and use of pragmatic competence. Interlanguage pragmatics can be developed in a natural context implicitly or through explicit instruction (Masrouf et al., 2019; Schauer, 2019; Taguchi, 2020). There exist different approaches and techniques for teaching interlanguage pragmatics as teaching approaches (e.g., explicit or implicit) and techniques (e.g., communicative practice, awareness raising) which have gone under researchers' studies. For instance, Farashaiyan et al. (2014) listed implicit and explicit instruction of items, awareness-raising activities, communicative practice activities, corrective feedback, and cultural instruction as the main pragmatics instruction activities.

Muthusamy and Farashaiyan (2016) examined the instructional approaches and techniques Iranian instructors apply for practicing interlanguage pragmatics in their classroom practices. To carry out the study, the researchers collected data from 238 Iranian instructors using a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Both quantitative and qualitative results indicated that the instructors utilized inductive and implicit approaches more than deductive and explicit ones. Regarding the pragmatic consciousness-raising techniques, instructors used conversation topics and situations more than others. They also applied role-play and pair-work techniques to increase learners' pragmatics communicative awareness. However, the instructors did not provide language learners with adequate explanation of appropriate expressions. Plonsky and Zhuang (2019) also indicated that L2 learners use pragmatic information in the form of implicit and explicit

instruction, and they used input enhancement, consciousness-raising, feedback, and practice (with or without production) to instruct pragmatics. With regard to the approaches for pragmatic instruction, numerous researchers confirmed the usefulness of explicit approach of pragmatic instruction than the implicit one (Derakhshan & Shakki, 2020; Halenko & Jones, 2011; Hosseini, 2016; Rueda, 2006).

In another study, Hosseini (2016) looked into the effect of one of these communicative techniques like role-play on pragmatic competence improvement of Iranian male and female EFL learners. To find the answer, he selected forty undergraduate students (15 males and 25 females) based on the Nelson proficiency test. Participants were majoring in English at Karaj Azad University, who were divided into two mixed-groups. Group A did role play while group B did conversation accompanied by free discussion techniques. The findings indicated that the participants in the role play group outperformed the learners in a conversation accompanied by free discussion group.

Salemi et al., (2012) compared the effect of implicit vs explicit instruction and feedback on Iranian EFL learners' pragmatic competence development. After assigning 100 participants into four experimental groups and one control group randomly, they offered the treatment to the participants. Findings of the study indicated the efficiency of explicit pragmatic instruction and explicit feedback more than implicit one on EFL learners' performance. Rueda (2006) also discussed the effect of explicit pragmatic instruction in FL contexts. The findings of his study revealed the effectiveness of explicit instruction in foreign language classrooms as there are many aspects of second language pragmatics that require direct instruction; otherwise, the learners may not comprehend them, or it takes a long time to learn them.

Halenko and Jones (2011) evaluated the impact of explicit interventional treatment on developing pragmatic awareness and production of requests in an English for academic purposes context in the U.K. with Chinese learners of English. In this experimental research, twenty-six language learners were assigned to each experimental and control group. The findings illustrated that explicit instruction was active in the development of

pragmatically appropriate request language. In addition to the approaches for teaching, several researchers focused on different interlanguage pragmatic instruction techniques and their usefulness as they involve the activities instructors need to apply in their classroom context (Aufa, 2011; Jernigan, 2012; Rashidi & Ramezani, 2013; Youn, 2020). In a study done by Alemi et.al (2017), they investigated the effectiveness of using game-based activities for pragmatic instruction. Results of the study illuminated the usefulness of instruction with game-based activities on language learners' pragmatic awareness.

Rashidi and Ramezani (2013) did a study to identify the difference between applying a role-play activity before and after the formal pragmatic instruction on the development of Persian EFL learners. To carry out the study, thirty Persian EFL language learners were assigned randomly into two groups of fifty. The results revealed that the students who did role-play before formal instruction outperformed those who did the role play after the instruction.

The review of this brief literature indicates that several scholars (Bardovi-Harlig, 2020; Bardovi-Harlig & Griffin, 2005; Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; Noroozi, 2012) examined the concepts of interlanguage pragmatics, and pragmatic competence and different approaches to pragmatics instruction (explicit versus implicit) to second language and foreign language learners; however, the literature review illustrates that the examination of the techniques employed by male and female teachers to instruct interlanguage pragmatics has remained underexplored. The present study is designed to fill the gap by determining what techniques male and female EFL teachers use to teach pragmatics. To be more precise, this study was guided by a research question:

Research question: Is there any significant difference between the techniques employed by Iranian EFL male and female instructors to teach interlanguage pragmatics?

## Method

### Design of the study

The present study employed a quantitative research design to answer the research questions. The researchers used a questionnaire to identify the

techniques male and female Iranian teachers employ to instruct interlanguage pragmatics.

### Participants

Two hundred eleven Iranian EFL teachers participated in this study. These teachers were teaching at a language institute that has branches in 10 provinces in Iran. A quota sampling procedure was employed in this research in the following way. Initially, the researchers selected 10 provinces out of 21 randomly, and 50 instructors from those provinces were communicated using email services or WhatsApp. The researchers managed to glean non-confidential contact information of these participants from the central branch. Around 42 percent of the contacted instructors returned the questionnaire in 20 days. All teachers taught at intermediate levels. They were native speakers of Farsi whose ages ranged between 26 and 47. The participants' English language teaching experience ranged between 6 and 12 years. More than half of the participants were female (N = 112, 53.08 %), and the others were male (N = 99, 46.91 %).

### Instruments

The questionnaire that examined L2 teachers' use of different techniques to teach pragmatics was developed by Muthusamy and Farashaiyan (2016). This questionnaire, which has been employed frequently in different studies, was adapted by the researchers after the expert panel's check. It includes 27 items and is organized in Likert-scale format. The respondents could give scores between one (never) and five (always). The questionnaire includes four main factors: awareness-raising, communicative practice, corrective feedback, and culture instruction.

Although the measure was validated by the developers, the researchers of this study sent it to an expert panel to check the validity of the questionnaire for the present context. There were 12 experienced pragmatics university instructors in the panel who examined the questionnaire individually. To quantify experts' perceptions, the researchers asked them to give a score between one and ten to the suitability of the questionnaire to be administered in an Iranian context. The panel was mostly positive about the questionnaire (M = 8.93, SD = .39). Finally, Cronbach's alpha was employed to examine the reliability of the questionnaire, and the value of .87 was obtained.

### Data Collection and Analysis

The data required to answer the research question was collected in 20 days. The researchers employed quota sampling in which 50 instructors were selected from 10 provinces through email services or WhatsApp. After identifying potential participants, the researchers sent the questionnaire to 500 teachers in different cities in Iran, and 211 teachers returned the questionnaires in three weeks. The questionnaires were sent and received through email services and WhatsApp. The researchers were ready to answer the respondents' questions, and only two questions were raised to clarify the meaning of some terms such as metapragmatic explanation and form-focused instruction.

The researchers used SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) 26. The data collected underwent descriptive statistics, and the mean and standard deviation of each item were computed. In addition, the researchers used Mann-Whitney U-test to identify possible differences between male and female participants in terms of the techniques they use to instruct interlanguage pragmatics.

### Results

Four different factors were analyzed using the employed questionnaire. The first factor dealt with the awareness-raising techniques. Ten items asked about male and female teachers' employed techniques. Table 1 provides data on the participants' responses to these items.

Table 1.

#### *Responses to Awareness-Raising Items*

Items	Male		Female		Z	sig
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
1 Using topics and situations	3.69	.81	3.48	.91	-1.63	.102
2 Using field experience	3.80	.63	3.77	.7	-.185	.853
3 Being a model of socially and culturally correct responses and behavior for my learners	2.91	1.02	3.13	.93	-1.72	.84
4 Reading scenario and identify correct responses and behavior from learners	3.22	.78	3.37	.97	-1.69	.90
5 Using translation and let students use their L1	2.80	.96	3.88	.71	-7.82	.001
6 Using form-focused instruction	3.88	.97	3.97	.63	-.26	.794
7 Using typographical enhancement techniques	3.83	.96	3.91	.68	-.168	.86
8 Giving explicit metapragmatic explanation	3.41	1.02	3.58	.90	-1.11	.267
9 Employing videos or films	2.85	1.04	3.93	.76	-7.37	.001
10 Using the culture puzzle, language games and classroom guest from foreign cultures	2.92	1.15	3.96	.72	-6.78	.001

As provided in Table 1, the male and female teachers' responses to different items were not significantly different ( Z Using topics and situations= -1.63, p = .102; Z Using field experience= -.185, p = .853; Z Being a model = -1.72, p = .84; Z Reading scenario= -1.69, p = .9; Z Using form-focused instruction = -.26, p .794; Z Using typographical enhancement techniques = -

.168, p = .86; Z Giving explicit metapragmatic explanation = -1.11, p = .267); however, the findings showed that female teachers used more L1 in teaching interlanguage pragmatics ( Z Using L1= -7.82, p < .05). They were also more interested in using videos ( Z = -7.37, p < .05) as well as language puzzles and games ( Z = -6.78, p < .05).

Table 2.

#### *Responses to Communicative Practice Items*

Items	Male		Female		Z	sig
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
11 Using role-plays to practice the language functions	4.2	.82	4.01	.75	-1.94	.072
12 Using conversation model	3.63	.78	3.43	.83	-2.13	.068



Items	Male		Female		Z	sig
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
13 Creating situations for pair-work or group-work	3.43	.83	3.63	.78	-.599	.548
14 Using dialog completion from the book	3.97	.65	3.98	.85	-1.10	.26
15 Discussing socially and culturally appropriate language and behavior	3.66	.97	3.75	.74	-.22	.82
16 Asking learners to do email exchanges	3.96	.72	3.42	.81	-4.8	.001
17 Using computer programs	3.9	.67	3.83	.69	-.919	.358

Table 2 indicates that male and female teachers used role-plays ( $Z = -1.94, p = .072$ ), conversation models ( $Z = -2.13, p = .068$ ), pair-work or group-work ( $Z = -.599, p = .548$ ), dialogue completion ( $Z = -1.1, p = .26$ ), discussions ( $Z = -.22, p = .82$ ), and computer programs ( $Z = .919, p = .358$ ) with no significant difference; however, the male participants used more email activities to teach

interlanguage pragmatics significantly more than the female teachers ( $Z = -4.8, p < .05$ ).

The third factor examined in this study dealt with the teachers' use of feedback in their interlanguage pragmatics instruction. Table 3 provides data on the comparison of the participants' responses.

Table 3  
*Responses to Corrective Feedback Items*

Items	Male		Female		Z	sig
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
18 Reformulating learners' mistakes	3.74	.77	3.56	.87	-1.40	.161
19 Repeating language learner's mistake	3.89	.81	3.72	.71	-2.04	.067
20 Eliciting a correct form from learners	3.94	.83	3.85	.98	-.38	.704
21 Proving learners with the feedback& correct form	4.11	.74	4.21	.69	-.037	.870
22 Providing metalinguistic information	3.72	.95	3.58	.76	-1.61	.106

As the data in Table 3 show, the male and female participants expressed the use of different feedback types with no significant difference ( $Z$  reformulating learners' mistakes = -1.40,  $p = .161$ ;  $Z$  repeating learners' mistakes = -2.04,  $p = .067$ ;  $Z$  eliciting a correct form from learners = -.38,  $p = .704$ ;  $Z$  providing learners with the feedback and

correct form = -.037,  $p = .870$ ;  $Z$  providing metalinguistic information = -1.61,  $p = .106$ ).

The last factor examined in this research addressed the use of culture teaching techniques. Table 4 reveals the results of the comparison of male and female teachers' responses to the relevant items.

Table 4.  
*Responses to Culture Instruction Items*

Items	Male		Female		Z	sig
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
23 Sharing cultural information	3.09	.70	3.15	.72	-.706	.481
24 Asking learners' cultural information	3.45	.95	3.24	.75	-1.45	.145
25 Asking learners to do cultural research	3.38	.92	3.29	.90	-.822	.411
26 Showing movies of other cultures	3.48	.76	4.17	.60	-6.59	.001
27 Putting pictures of other cultures	3.23	.87	4.18	.71	-7.53	.001

The last factor investigated in this study addressed the issue of culture instruction. As Table 4 shows, the male and female teachers did not show any significant difference in using some techniques such as sharing cultural information ( $Z = -.706, p =$

.481), asking learners' cultural information ( $Z = -1.45, p = .145$ ), and asking learners to do cultural research ( $Z = -.822, p = .411$ ), but female teachers expressed higher levels of using some tasks such as showing movies of other cultures ( $Z = -6.59, p <$

.05) and putting pictures of other cultures ( $Z = -7.53, p < .05$ ).

## Discussion

The findings of this study contributed to the literature on interlanguage pragmatics instruction by showing how male and female teachers use different techniques to instruct different L2 pragmatics items. This section deals with the discussion of the main findings of this study in light of related literature.

This study aimed to answer this research question:

Is there any significant difference between the techniques employed by Iranian EFL male and female instructors to teach interlanguage pragmatics?

The findings of this study indicated that in some cases (using L1, choosing different technologies and preferring for different instruments) male and female instructors employed different techniques.

One of the main findings of this study was the high level of L1 use in teaching interlanguage pragmatics. The literature has supported the facilitative role of using L1 in accomplishing awareness-raising activities that help learners deeply understand pragmatic items (Bardovi-Harling & Griffin, 2005; Muthusamy & Farashaiyan, 2016). Considering the complexity of pragmatic issues, it is likely that teachers use different techniques, such as resorting to learners' L1 to ensure the acquisition of various items by learners (Alhebaishi, 2017; Aufa, 2011). In this study, the results showed that female teachers more than male ones use learners' L1 to teach L2 pragmatics. This finding is in line with the study of Al-Amir (2017) and Chavez (2000) which described female instructors as facilitators as they are more flexible in using L1 than male teachers for effective communication in pedagogical settings. They try to simplify the issue for their learners using L1 as they usually prioritize their students' learning over other issues (Abid, 2020; Mohebbi & Alavi, 2014).

The literature on L2 pragmatics instruction suggests that communicative practice techniques play a significant role in both implicit and explicit instruction of interlanguage pragmatics (Bardis et al., 2021; Muthusamy & Farashaiyan, 2016; Rashidi

& Ramezani, 2013). Teachers usually benefit from communicative techniques to cover introduction, production, and practice while covering interlanguage pragmatics items (Bardis et al., 2021; Bardovi-Harling, 2020). Communicative techniques which can be performed in different forms, including role play, conversation model, dialogue completion, authentic discussion, and technological activities. In line with the literature (Tan & Farashaiyan, 2016; Rashidi & Ramezani, 2013), the findings of the present study indicated that in most cases, male and female instructors did not show significantly different preferences to use communicative techniques.

A set of significant differences were identified in teachers' use of email services and audiovisual materials in classes to practice L2 pragmatics. While male teachers significantly more than female ones employed email services to practice interlanguage pragmatics, the findings revealed that female teachers employed videos or films as well as pictures in their teaching significantly more than male instructors. This can be in line with the fact although a majority of male and female teachers agreed that the use of technology is an integral part of life and the need for it can be seen in teaching contexts nowadays, inconsistent differences exist between male and female instructors. These discrepancies favor males in some situations and females in others (Gibbs & Bernas, 2010; Top et al., 2011). For instance, Houtz and Gupta (2001) and Yuen and Ma (2002) indicated a strong correlation between gender and the use of computers. Furthermore, some researchers like Ray et al., (1999) revealed more positive attitudes of females than males about computers whereas Astrid (2002) illustrated males' higher levels of confidence in using computer software than females. Almekhlafi, et al., (2017) pointed out that female teachers used audio-visual aids like audio and video tapes more than males. In contrast, males' preferences were towards using emails and distance education instruction.

This study also indicated that Iranian English language instructors used different types of feedback regarding methods of corrective feedback based on Lyster and Ranta (1997) such as recasts, metalinguistic feedback, explicit correction, clarification requests, elicitation, and repetition

while teaching interlanguage pragmatics. Several prior studies have emphasized the positive effects of using corrective feedback on learners' L2 pragmatics knowledge development (Ha et al., 2021; Khorshidi & Rassaie, 2013; Lyster, 1998; Rabab'ah & Begrimet, 2020), and it seems that both male and female instructors, with no significant difference, benefited from corrective feedback to improve the quality of their instruction. The literature mostly supports the use of feedback in employing feedback in foreign/second language teaching settings as it, in its different implicit or explicit forms, can activate language learners' cognitive processes when the instructors aim to inform learners about their errors and increase their linguistic knowledge (Ha et al., 2021; Lyster, 1998; Rassaie, 2021). The effectiveness of corrective feedback was also supported by the proponents of Schmidt's noticing hypothesis (1990) which emphasizes its facilitative role in triggering learners' realizing the gap between their errors and correct form (Rezai et al., 2011; Schmidt, 1990).

One of the crucial factors that language learners should be aware of is cultural points of the target language without which misconceptions are likely to occur during interactions. Cultural awareness deals with a society's ideologies, norms, and beliefs (Ara, 2019; Badrkhani, 2017; Chidinman Chinenye & Unachukwu, 2021). Teaching culture can inform learners about what makes native speakers choose one linguistic expression rather than others during interaction (Kecskes, 2014; Lenchuk & Ahmed, 2013). It is widely accepted that language and culture are interdependent (Charyulu & Ganesh, 2018; Salim, 2017; Savvidou & Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2019); therefore, language teaching is culture teaching. The concept of socio-pragmatic competence, which has been highlighted as an integral part of several language models, urges the consideration of contexts' social and cultural variables for using the appropriate language (Badrkhani, 2017; Gao, 2006; Gandhari et al., 2021). In the present study, both male and female teachers expressed their use of techniques pertinent to cultural awareness; however, the female teachers more than males used pictures and movies in teaching culture.

## Conclusion

The presence of pragmatic misunderstandings in the interactions among the native and non-native speakers of different languages has underscored the significance of interlanguage pragmatics and its instruction. However, the literature on pragmatics has uncovered the insufficiency of current pragmatics instruction in developing learners' pragmatics knowledge (Cohen, 2017; Taguchi & Roever, 2017). One of the reasons that may have caused this unsatisfactory performance is the L2 teachers' selection of techniques to instruct pragmatics (Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; Muthusamy & Farashaiyan, 2016; Plonsky & Zhuang, 2019). This study investigated the extent to which male and female Iranian English teachers used different techniques to instruct interlanguage pragmatics. The findings of this study indicated that female teachers more than male ones used L1 in their instruction, films, language games, and pictures to teach interlanguage pragmatics; however, the male teachers used significantly more than the female participants email-exchanging activities to improve their learners' L2 pragmatics.

The findings of this study provided insight into how different male and female teachers employ different instructional techniques to instruct interlanguage pragmatics. Based on this research, teachers use a wide range of instructional techniques, and some different preferences were expressed by male and female teachers.

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