A Pragmatic Study of Speech Acts by Iranian and Spanish Nonnative English Learners

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Abstract
This study was an attempt to investigate Iranian and Spanish intermediate nonnative English learners' request strategies to their faculty. To this aim, 74 (50 Iranian and 24 Spanish) nonnative English intermediate learners participated in this study. A discourse completion test (DCT) was used to elicit the request strategies used by the participants. The findings suggested the participants employed the conventionally indirect request strategy to their faculty in a higher percentage. The results revealed that the effect of L1 was not significance on the choice of request strategies by the participants to the faculty.
***Keywords*:** Request Strategies; Indirectness; Politeness

1. Introduction

One fundamental attribute for successful communicators in an L2 has been that L2 learners should know not only grammar and text organization, but also pragmatic aspects of L2. Pragmatic competence entails "grammatical and lexical systems" along with "social and contextual factors underlying the English language." These elements are "shared by members of a given speech community in order to establish and maintain successful communication" (Uso-Juan & Martinez-Flor, 2008, p. 349). Pragmatic competence, in essence, aids L2 learners to use L2 in a wide range of environments, factoring in the relationships between the speakers involved and the social and cultural context of the situation (Gass & Selinker, 2001); however, it still is possible that L2 learners lack pragmatic competence. Differently put, they may still be unable to produce appropriate L2 utterances because they may not be fully aware of all the sociolinguistic rules governing the appropriateness of speech acts in L2 (Eisenstein & Bodman, 1998).

The study of requests has been center of investigation for decades. Requesting behavior offers a particularly good opportunity to examine the potential connections between linguistic politeness and L1. This is mainly related to the fact that requests are possibly the clearest examples of "rapport-sensitive speech acts" (Spencer-Oatey, 2000, p. 18). However, the speech act of request has been center of investigation for decades (e.g., Alemi & Khanlarzadeh, 2016; Jalilifar, 2009, Hashemian, 2013), it is not clear whether Iranian and Spanish nonnative English intermediate learners use similar/different request strategies to their faculty. Therefore, the present study was undertaken to reveal whether the L1 effects on Iranian and Spanish nonnative English intermediate learners' request strategies in

their L2 (i.e., English) to their faculty are consistent or not. This decision was further motivated by recent changes in the values orientation of the younger generation that influence the teacher-student relationship, which may have become less asymmetric; L2 learners are allowed to evaluate the lecturer's work and they are allowed to ask postponements of their duties (Chejnová, 2014). In so doing, the present study was conducted to reveal the possible similarities/differences in Iranian and Spanish nonnative English intermediate learners' patterns of linguistic politeness so as to contribute to better understanding of L2 learners' development of pragmatic competence. Therefore, it was attempted to find answers to the following questions:

1. What are the request strategies employed by Iranian and Spanish nonnative English intermediate learners to faculty?
2. Is there any relationship between L1 and Iranian and Spanish nonnative English intermediate learners request performance?

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The participants of this study were 74 Iranian and 24 Spanish nonnative English intermediate learners. They were chosen based on convenience sampling. The Spanish nonnative English participants were studying English in four language institutes in London. Their ages ranged from 18-40. They were Spanish nonnative English intermediate learners who had arrived in England over the last 2 years as permanent residents. The Iranian nonnative English participants were English Translation students in University in Iran. They were Native speakers of Farsi and belonged to the same racial group (i.e., Persian). The Iranian nonnative English participants' ages ranged from 19-25. All the information (e.g., age and L1) related to the participants were extracted by means of a questionnaire.

2.2. Instrument

A questionnaire was utilized to elicit all the information (e.g., age and L1) related to the participants. Further, the instruments included the Oxford Placement Test (OPT, Allen, 1992) to assess the participants' level of proficiency. The reliability of the test, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, was 0.87. Further, a discourse completion test (DCT; Birjandi & Rezaei, 2010) was utilized to elicit the participants' responses. The DCT included eight situations for the request situations to faculty.

2.3. Procedure

In the first step of study, the participants were provided with a demography form. The demography from elicited the required information (e.g., age, race, L1, etc.). Then, the instruments (i.e., OPT and DCT) were administered to the participants in different sessions. In the first step, the OPT was administered to them to check their homogeneity. The test had 100 multiple-choice questions, which assessed the participants' knowledge of grammar. The test was designed to be done

within 40 min. The OPT results assured the homogeneity of participants in terms of their level of proficiency. They were, then, asked to fill in the DCT. The participants were required to read short descriptions of each situations in English, and then, write their answers in English. The allocated time to fill the DCT was between 20 min.

2.4. Coding Scheme

The elicited request strategies by the participants were categorized based on the taxonomy developed by Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989) to recognize the participants' request strategies:

- Direct Strategies
    1. Mood Derivable
    2. Performative
    3. Hedged Performative
    4. Locution Derivable
    5. Want Statement
- Conventional Indirect Strategies
    6. Suggestory Formula
    7. Query Preparatory
- Nonconventional Indirect Strategies
    8. Strong Hint
    9. Mild Hint

3. Results

The request strategies elicited through the DCT were analyzed to determine the possible similarities/differences between Iranian and Spanish nonnative English intermediate learners in the use of request strategies to the faculty. In the first step, frequency and percentage of occurrence of each situation were calculated. Results indicated that both the Iranian and Spanish nonnative English participants used conventionally indirect strategies in a higher percentage. The detailed description of analyses is presented in Table 1:

Table 1 *Distribution of EFL/ESL Learners' Request strategies*

Situation	Group	Mood	Want	Query	Strong	Mild
Book	INNESL	4(%8.0)	9(%18)	33(%66)	3(%6.0)	1(%2.0)
	SNNESL	0(%0.0)	4(%16.7)	19(%79.2)	0(%0.0)	1(%4.2)
PowerPoint	INNESL	4(%8.0)	8(%16)	36(%72)	2(%4)	0(%0.0)
	SNNESL	1(%4.2)	3(%12.5)	19(%79.2)	1(%4.2)	0(%0.0)
Phone number	INNESL	2(%4.0)	8(%16)	38(%76.0)	2(%4)	0(%0.0)
	SNNESL	0(%0.0)	1(%4.2)	23(%95.8)	0(%0.0)	0(%0.0)
Explanation	INNESL	3(%6.0)	7(%14.0)	38(%76.0)	2(%4)	0(%0.0)
	SNNESL	0(%0.0)	3(%12.5)	21(%87.5)	0(%0.0)	0(%0.0)
clarification	INESL	0(%0.0)	11(%22.0)	28(%56.0)	5(%10.0)	6(%12.0)
	SNNESL	0(%0.0)	0(%0.0)	13(%54.2)	0(%0.0)	11(%45.8)

Exam date	INNESL	2(%4.0)	11(%22.0)	33(%66.0)	2(%4.0)	2(%4.0)
	SNNESL	0(%0.0)	2(%8.3)	21(%87.5)	0(%0.0)	1(%4.2)
Paper	INNESL	0(%0.0)	10(%20.0)	37(%74.0)	3(%6)	0(%0.0)
	SNNESL	0(%0.0)	4(%16.7)	18(%75.0)	0(%0.0)	2(%8.3)
Appointment	INNESL	0(%0.0)	11(%22)	34(%68.0)	2(%4.0)	3(%6.0)
	SNNESL	0(%0.0)	3(%12.5)	21(%87.5)	0(%0.0)	0(%0.0)

*INNESL stands for Iranian nonnative English learners.
*SNNESL stands for Spanish nonnative English learners.

As Table 1 illustrates, query preparatory strategy is the mostly employed type of strategy by the Iranian and Spanish nonnative English participants. However, the Spanish nonnative English participants used it in a higher percentage.

In order to answer the second research question and to see whether there is a relationship between L1 and the request strategies employed by the participants, chi-square was run for each situation. As for the first situation, the chi-square findings ($\chi2$= 1.493, $p >$ .05) suggested that there was no relationship between L1 and the request strategies employed by the participants in this situation. The chi-square findings for the second situation also indicated that there was no relationship between L1 and the request strategies employed by the participants in this situation ($\chi2$ = .156, $p >$ .05). In situation # 3, the chi-square results ($\chi2$ = 4.269, $p >$ .05) indicated that was no relationship between L1 and the request strategies employed by the participants in this situation. In situation # 4, the results ($\chi2$ = .901, $p >$.05) indicated that was no relationship between L1 and the request strategies employed by the participants in this situation. As for situation # 5, the findings ($\chi2$ = 5.195, $p >$. 05) indicated there was no relationship between L1 and the request strategies employed by the participants in this situation. The results of chi-square ($\chi2$ = 3.834, $p >$ .05) in situation # 7, also indicated there was no relationship between L1 and the request strategies employed by the participants in this situation.

However, the chi-square findings ($\chi2$ = 6.807, $p <$ .05) for situation # 6, indicated there was a relationship between L1 and the request strategies employed by the participants in this situation. In the same vein, in situation # 8, the chi-square finings ($\chi2$ = 11.556, $p <$ .05) confirmed a significant relationship between L1 and the request strategies employed by the participants in this situation.

4. Discussion

The present study sought to investigate the possible similarities and differences between Iranian and Spanish nonnative English intermediate learners' request strategies. And, to see whether there is a relationship between L1 and the request strategies employed by Iranian and Spanish nonnative English intermediate learners. The frequency findings suggested that the Spanish nonnative English participants employed negative polite strategies (i.e., conventionally indirect strategies) in a higher percentage than their Iranian nonnative English counterparts. Further, the Iranian nonnative English participants tended to use direct strategies

more than the Spanish nonnative English participants. However, the account of employed direct request strategies by the Iranian nonnative English participants was not significant (except for two situation). The chi-square findings manifested that there is no relationship between L1 and the request strategies employed by the participants. The results of this study are in line with a number of studies (e.g., Jalilifar, 2009; Hassall, 2003; Sun & Zhang, 2008; Ueda, 2006), who found L2 learners opt to use more conventionally indirect strategies. A good and often mentioned reason that the nonnative English participants used more conventionally indirect strategies is explained by Chen and Chen's (2007). They claim that there is a general tendency to use conventionally indirect strategies for (non)native speakers of English.

The results of this study provided supports that Iranian L2 learners' pragmatic knowledge is acceptable. It may be that the advent of L2 leaners' pragmatic competence is attributed to development of technology (e.g., access to internet) that provided the opportunity for the Iranian nonnative English intermediate participants to get involved in communicative situations. More specifically, with the tools of technology making their way into the L2 classroom, Iranian nonnative English learners in different parts of the world have access to authentic language and communicate with native speakers through social media (e.g., chat). This makes it possible for L2 learners to communicate with native speakers, and accordingly develop their L2 pragmatic competence.

However, the slight differences between the Iranian and Spanish nonnative English participants may lies in the length of residence of the Spanish nonnative English participants in an English country (i.e., England). Yamanaka (2003) lends support to this claim by providing evidence that Spanish nonnative English learners, who live in English countries usually have enough opportunity for social contact with native speakers that accordingly increases their pragmatic competence. He further argues that the exposure to culturally rich input may provide nonnative English learners with an opportunity to become familiar with the L2 pragmatic rules that native speakers apply in different situations. This, accordingly, may contribute to greater opportunities for nonnative English learners, living in English countries to be pragmatically competent.

5. Conclusion

One of the issue which is probably of a prominent concern to L2 researchers and teachers is to examine the employed request strategies by L2 learners with their instructors. This study was twofold: First, this study was conducted to see whether Iranian and Spanish nonnative English intermediate learners employ the similar/different request strategies to faculty. Second, it aimed to see whether there is a relationship between L1 and the request strategies employed by Iranian and Spanish nonnative English intermediate learners. The

findings of this study showed no significance difference between Iranian and Spanish nonnative English intermediate learners; however, the Iranian nonnative English intermediate learners tended to use more direct strategies in a higher percentage. Findings of this study may be applied to communicative L2 teaching and the study of intercultural communication. As the focus of this study was on the use of requesting head act, the outcome of the study may shed some light on the importance of focus on oral communication in faculty context.

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