

**An Interlanguage Pragmatic Study of Expressions of Gratitude
by Iranian EFL Learners – A Pilot Study**

Maryam Farnia

Universiti Sains Malaysia

Raja Rozina Raja Suleiman

Universiti Sains Malaysia

Abstract

Interlanguage pragmatics research has contributed a great deal to our understanding of L2 pragmatic use but not so much to our understanding of L2 pragmatic development (Nguyen, 2005) due to the fact that the great majority of studies focuses on “L2 use rather than development” (Kasper,1996:145). The shortage of developmental pragmatic research, as opposed to pragmatic performance, makes it an area of inquiry in SLA research (Rose, 2000). This pilot study examines the speech act of expressing gratitude among Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Data were collected from 2 groups of Iranian EFL learners, i.e. at intermediate and advanced levels of language proficiency, using a written Discourse Completion Task (DCT). L1 and L2 baseline data were also collected from a group of Iranian native speakers of Farsi and a group of American native speakers of English. The purpose of the present study is two-fold, i.e. to investigate the strategies Iranian EFL learners use when expressing gratitude and to

compare these strategies with those used by native speakers of Farsi and native speakers of English. The data were also analyzed in terms of whether EFL learners' L2 pragmatic competence is towards or away from the target language as the level of proficiency increases. It is hoped that this study will add to the body of research on developmental pragmatics.

Introduction

A review of the available literature on the area under study is presented in this section.

Communicative competence

The concept of communicative competence, first introduced by Hymes (1966), is defined as “what a speaker needs to know to communicate appropriately within a particular speech community” (Saville-Troike, 1996:362). Hymes’ communicative competence was originally a reaction to Chomsky’s (1965) linguistic competence which discounts contextual appropriateness (Barron, 2003:8). Canale and Swain (1980) developed Hymes’ (1972) theoretical concept of communicative competence into grammatical competence (lexis, morphology, sentence-grammar, semantics, and phonology), and sociolinguistic competence (sociocultural rules and rules of discourse). Canale (1983) made a further distinction between sociolinguistic competence (sociocultural rules) and discourse competence (cohesion and coherence). In Bachman’s (1990) model of communicative competence language competence was broken down into two discrete components, namely pragmatic competence and organization competence. Organization competence consists of grammatical competence and textual competence, while

pragmatic competence comprises illocutionary competence and sociolinguist competence. In other words, Bachman's (1990) pragmatic competence is concerned with the relationship between utterances and the functions that speakers intend to perform through those utterances (illocutionary force) and the characteristics of the context of language use that determine the appropriateness of utterances. Leech (1983) and Thomas (1983) divide pragmatics into pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics. In fact, this model clarifies the distinction between ability and knowledge. According to Thomas (1983), pragmalinguistic knowledge refers to the linguistic encoding of pragmatic force, and sociopragmatic knowledge refers to the perceptions of what constitutes appropriate linguistic behavior. Moreover, Cohen (1996) proposes two distinct levels of abilities required for acquisition of pragmatic competence, namely sociocultural ability and sociolinguistic ability. Speakers' sociocultural ability is used to determine which speech act is appropriate given the culture involved, the situation, the speakers' background variables and relationships. Sociolinguistic ability constitutes "the speakers' control over the actual language forms used to realize the speech acts (e.g. 'sorry' vs. 'excuse me', 'really sorry' vs. 'very sorry')" (Cohen, 1996: 388).

Applying Bachman's (1990) notion of pragmatic competence, the present study examines Iranian EFL learners' L2 pragmatic competence in performing expressions of gratitude after receiving an offer. The speech act of expressing gratitude is discussed next.

Expressing gratitude

One important aspect of pragmatic competence is the production and understanding of speech acts and their appropriateness in a given situation (Cheng, 2005: 9). Austin (1962) defines speech acts as the actions performed in saying something. According to Austin's theory, these "functional units in communication" (Cohen, 1996: 384) have propositional or locutionary meaning (the literal meaning of the utterance), illocutionary meaning (the

social function of the utterance), and perlocutionary force (the effect produced by the utterance in a given context) (Cohen, 1996: 384). Speech act theory therefore attempts to explain how speakers use language to meet intended actions and how hearers infer intended meaning from what is said. Eisenstein and Bodman (1986) have identified thanking as an illocutionary act under Searle's classification of speech act (Searle, 1976). Their study indicates that an expression of gratitude is:

“An illocutionary act performed by a speaker which is based on a past act performed by the hearer. This past act benefits the speaker and the speaker believes it to have benefited him or her. The speaker feels grateful or appreciative, and makes a statement which counts as an expression of gratitude.” (p. 167)

However, not all expressions using the word ‘thank you’ refer to gratitude (Eisenstein and Bodman, 1993). They can also refer to other language functions such as compliments and closings (Rubin, 1983). Even the use of thanking might differ from culture to culture. For instance, ‘thank you’ used in American English is more common as an expression of gratitude while in British English it is more a formal marker (Hymes, 1972, cited in Eisenstein and Bodman, 1993:65). As Coulmas (1981) puts it:

“The social relation of the participants and the inherent properties of the object of gratitude work together to determine the degree of gratefulness that should be expressed in a given situation. Differences in this respect are obviously subject to cultural variation.” (p.75)

Saying thank you is a problem not only for native speakers, but also for second language learners who need to know when and how to thank in the target culture (Bodman and Eisenstein, 1988; Eisenstein and Bodman, 1986, 1993). The problem is typically considered in terms of when and how thanking is an appropriate response to the social situation (Cheng, 2005:3). Kumar (2001) highlights the significance of expressions of gratitude in the following words:

“Expressions of gratitude in the normal day-to-day interactions between the members of a society seem obviously to fall in the category of the “social” use of language. Expressions of gratitude and politeness are a major instrument the use of which keeps the bonds between the members of a society well-cemented and strong. They are used profusely and extensively both side by side with and in addition to reciprocating actions. Many are the occasions when, were we to be deprived of the opportunity to use an expression of gratitude, we would feel cheated and betrayed.”(p. 6)

Other studies have shown that even advanced learners have difficulty adequately expressing gratitude (Eisenstein and Bodman, 1986, 1993; Hinkel, 1994). Moreover, while there is a large body of literature on requests and some on apologies, the speech act of thanking has not been studied much (Kasper and Blum-Kulka, 1993:59).

Interlanguage pragmatics

Pragmatics as a domain of inquiry within second language acquisition is usually referred to as Interlanguage Pragmatics. Interlanguage pragmatics refers to the “nonnative speakers’ comprehension and production of speech acts, and how their L2 (second language)-related speech act knowledge is acquired” (Kasper and Dahl, 1991: 1). In other words, interlanguage pragmatics is the study of the use and acquisition of various speech acts in the target language by second language learners (Nguyen, 2005). Since the late 80s, there have been some important empirical research in the realm of interlanguage pragmatics; however, interlanguage pragmatics is still an “incipient area not so much of theory but of research” (Valle, 1998:139).

In interlanguage pragmatics studies, there is still an ongoing debate on the relationship between L2 proficiency and L1 transfer or the influence of learners’ native language and culture on their production and comprehension of L2 speech acts. Some

researchers have hypothesized that L2 proficiency is positively correlated with pragmatic transfer (T. Takahashi and Beebe, 1987; Blum-Kulka, 1982; and Olshtain and Cohen, 1989). The assumption is that more proficient learners have enough control over the L2 to express L1 NSs' opinions at the pragmatic level; thus, they are more likely to transfer L1 sociocultural norms than less proficient learners (Takahashi and Beebe, 1993; Takahashi, 1996). In their study Takahashi and Beebe (1987) found that highly proficient Japanese ESL learners often used a typically Japanese formal tone when performing refusals in L2. Moreover, low- and high-proficiency learners differ in the order and frequency of semantic formulas they used. Lower-proficiency learners were also more direct in their refusals than higher-level ESL learners. This study, however, did not clearly demonstrate the predicted proficiency effect (Takahashi, 1996: 194). A number of interlanguage pragmatic studies have shown that beginners' poor IL performance is due to their deficient L2 proficiency (e.g. Beebe and Takahashi, 1989). In Takahashi and Beebe's (1987) findings, low-proficiency learners are less likely to transfer L1 pragmatic knowledge because of their limited L2 proficiency. These findings make Takahashi and Beebe's hypothesis more plausible and "call for a more in-depth study of proficiency effects on pragmatic transfer" (Takahashi, 1996: 194).

Previous studies have shown that expressions of gratitude present interesting cultural differences across languages, though few have focused on Iranian EFL learners. In the light of interlanguage pragmatics, this study will focus on Iranian EFL learners' L2 pragmatic competence of expressions of gratitude. The following section will elaborate on the objectives of the study.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study are (a) to compare and contrast the strategies used by Iranians and Americans in expressing gratitude and (b) to study the extent to which Iranian EFL learners' pragmatic competence is towards or away from the target language as the level of proficiency increases. Based on the objectives of the study the following research questions are formulated:

1. How do Iranians and Americans differ in expressing gratitude?
2. What is the relationship between Iranian EFL learners' pragmatic competence and level of proficiency?

Methodology

The design of the present cross-sectional study examining the development of L2 pragmatic competence is outlined below. The instruments employed, the data collection procedure adopted, and the participants chosen are detailed.

Instruments

The instruments for the present study include a demographic survey and a discourse completion task (DCT). The original questionnaire was adopted from Cheng (2005). However, since Cheng's populations of study were Chinese and American, a metapragmatic assessment was used to modify the questionnaire in order to

accommodate the Iranian as well as American context. The metapragmatic assessment questioned the respondents about the likelihood of the situation, i.e. have they ever been in a particular situation, and if so, how grateful were they in receiving the favor in that situation. There are two language versions of the instrument: one in English and the other one in Farsi. Native speakers of English and EFL learners were given the English-language questionnaire and native speakers of Farsi were handed the questionnaire in Farsi.

Demographic Survey

There were three versions of the demographic survey: one for English EFL learners, one for Farsi native speakers and one for English native speakers. In addition to questions regarding their gender, age, major of study and experience living in another country, English EFL learners were asked about the estimated number of hours per day they spend on watching television programmes or listening to English radio programmes, conversing in English with Americans and non-Americans, and conversing in Farsi. Similarly, Farsi native speakers were asked to estimate their use of English in an average day or week.

Discourse Completion Task

A 14-item questionnaire was adopted from Cheng's (2005) study of expressions of gratitude. The scenarios or situations on the questionnaire varied according to social status, familiarity and imposition. An example of the DCT is presented below:

You are walking to class. You accidentally drop your papers and notes, which scatter all over the middle of a busy hallway. A student whom you don't know is

walking by and stops to help you pick up your papers and notes. When the student gives the papers and notes to you, what do you say?

These fourteen scenarios varied on the contextual factors of interlocutor familiarity and social status. Familiarity (i.e., social distance) and social status (i.e., power) were selected because they have been identified as the salient factors that affect speech behavior in cross-cultural pragmatics research (Brown and Levinson, 1987).

Subjects

The respondents for this study will be described as follows: Iranian EFL learners and native speakers.

Iranian EFL learners

Two groups of EFL learners were selected based on language proficiency and they were divided into two groups of intermediate and advanced learners. Each group consisted of 10 respondents. They were all university students majoring in English Language in Iran. English language is taught and learned in Iran as a foreign language. All were given the demographic survey as well as the discourse completion task in English. The findings of the demographic study are tabulated below.

Table1 displays the English learners' estimation of the amount of time they spent listening to English programmes in an average day.

Table 1: Frequency of estimated time English learners spent listening to English radio/television programs in an average day

	Less than 1 hour	1-3 hours	4-6 hours	10-12 hours	More than 12 hours	Total
Intermediate (n=10)	50% (5)	50% (5)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	100% (10)
Advanced (n=10)	70% (6)	10% (1)	40% (3)	0% (0)	0% (0)	100% (10)

Table 2 presents the frequency of estimated time English learners spent interacting in English with English native speakers in an average day. As the table shows both groups of language learners spend less than an hour per day interacting with native speakers of English.

Table 2: Frequency of estimated time English learners spent interacting in English with native speakers of English in an average day

	Less than 1 hour	1-3 hours	4-6 hours	10-12 hours	More than 12 hours	Total

Intermediate (n=10)	100% (10)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	100% (10)
Advanced (n=10)	100% (10)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	100% (10)

Table 3 displays the frequency of estimated time English learners spent interacting in English with non-Americans in an average day. As the table shows, the most number of hours they spend interacting with non-native speakers is 4 to 6 hours per day.

Table 3: Frequency of estimated time English learners spent interacting with English non-native speakers in English in an average day

	Less than 1 hour	1-3 hours	4-6 hours	10-12 hours	More than 12 hours	Total
Intermediate (n=10)	40% (4)	40% (4)	20% (2)	0% (0)	0% (0)	100% (10)
Advanced (n=10)	20% (2)	60% (6)	20% (2)	0% (0)	0% (0)	100% (10)

Table 4 shows the frequency of estimated time English learners spent interacting in Farsi in an average day.

Table 4: Frequency of estimated time English learners spent interacting in Farsi in an average day

	Less than 1 hour	1-3 hours	4-6 hours	10-12 hours	More than 12 hours	Total
Intermediate (n=10)	0% (0)	20% (2)	0% (0)	20% (2)	60% (6)	100% (10)
Advanced (n=10)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	60% (6)	40% (4)	100% (10)

Native Speaker subjects

The two baseline data for this study are from native speakers of English and native speakers of Farsi. 10 native speakers of Farsi were selected from university students in Iran, and 10 respondents from American native speakers of English were selected from American students who were either exchange students or tourists travelling to Malaysia.

Table 5: Frequency of estimated time native speakers of Farsi spent listening/interacting in English in an average day

	0	Less than 15 minutes	15 minutes	30 minutes	1 hour	2 hour	Total
Television/radio	20% 2	10% 1	50% 5	10% 1	10% 1	0% 0	100 10
Interact with a native speaker of English	20% 2	30% 3	30% 3	0% 0	20% 2	0% 0	100 10
Interact with a non-native speaker of English	20% 2	10 % 1	10% 1	40% 4	20% 2	0% 0	100 10

Data Analysis

After data collection, the responses were coded based on a coding scheme. The coding scheme was adopted from Cheng's (2005) study on expressions of gratitude. The descriptive analysis was used to answer the following questions: (a) How do Iranians and Americans differ in expressing gratitude? (b) What is the relationship between Iranian EFL learners' pragmatic competence and level of proficiency?

The coding scheme used in this study was adopted from Cheng (2005). Her taxonomy of thanking includes eight main strategies. The taxonomy of thanking is elaborated below:

1. Thanking

- a. thanking by using the word *thank you* (e.g., Thanks a lot! Thank you very much!)
- b. thanking and stating the favor (e.g. Thank you for your help!)
- c. thanking and mentioning the imposition caused by the favor (e.g. Thank you for helping me collect the papers.)

2. Appreciation

- a. using the word *appreciate* (e.g. I appreciate it!)
- b. using the word *appreciate* and mentioning the imposition caused by the favor (e.g. I appreciate the time you spent for me.)

3. Positive feelings

- a. by expressing a positive reaction to the favor giver (hearer) (e.g. You are a life saver!)
- b. by expressing a positive reaction to the object of the favor (e.g. This book was really helpful!)

4. Apology

- a. using only apologizing words (e.g. I'm sorry), or
- b. using apologizing words and stating the favor or the fact (e.g. I'm sorry for the problem I made!)
- c. criticizing or blaming oneself (e.g. I'm such a fool!)
- d. expressing embarrassment (e.g. It's so embarrassing!)

5. Recognition of imposition

- a. acknowledging the imposition (e.g. I know that you were not allowed to give me extra time!)
- b. stating the need for the favor (e.g. I try not to ask for extra time, but this time I need it!)
- c. diminishing the need for the favor (e.g. You didn't have to do that!).

6. Repayment

- a. offering or promising service, money, food or goods (e.g. Next time it's my turn to pay!)
- b. indicating indebtedness (e.g. I owe you one!)
- c. promising future self-restraint or self-improvement (e.g. It won't happen again!).

7. Others

Expressions that do not belong to the above strategies are categorized as other strategies. There are four subcategories under the other strategy:

- a. here statement (e.g. Here you are!)
- b. small talk (e.g. Your face is very familiar to me but I can't remember where I saw you. What do you study?)
- c. leave-taking (e.g. Have a nice day!)
- d. joking (e.g. Don't forget to pay again next time)

8. Attention getter

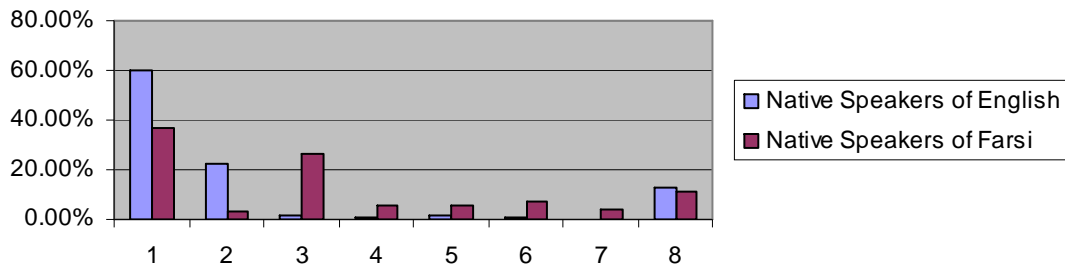
An alerter, as defined by Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989), is “an element functioning as an attention getter or an address term preceding the actual speech act to gain the hearer's attention or signal some interpersonal relationship” (cited in Cheng, 2005). In the thanking situations, attention getter and address term are likely to occur in the same utterance. The alerters include:

- a. attention getter (e.g. Hey, Hi, Well)
- b. title (e.g. Dr., Professor! Sir!)
- c. name (e.g. John, Mary)

The coded responses were then entered into the SPSS software programme and both descriptive and statistical analyses were performed. To answer the first research question, i.e. how Iranians and Americans differ in expressing gratitude, the study compared and contrasted the Iranian native speakers' of Farsi and American native speakers' of English

responses. Figure 1 shows the overall distribution of the strategies produced by native speakers of Farsi and native speakers of English. The findings displays that *thanking* is the most frequently used strategy by both native speakers of Farsi and native speakers of English. However, native speakers of English use this strategy more than native speakers of Farsi. As Figure1 shows *appreciation* is the second most frequently used strategy for native speakers of English while *positive feelings* is the second most frequently used strategy for native speakers of Farsi. The results show that native speakers of English produce more *alreters* than native speakers of Farsi while the frequency of *apology*, *imposition* and *repayment* strategies is higher in native speakers of Farsi than native speakers of English. The native speakers of English in this study resort to *positive feelings* and *imposition* strategies in expressing their gratitude.

Figure1: Frequency of overall use of strategies for native speakers of Farsi and native speakers of English



Note: 1 = thanking, 2 = appreciation, 3 = positive feelings, 4 = apology, 5 = recognition of imposition, 6 = repayment, 7 = others, 8 = alreters.

The findings also show that there was no manifestation of *other* strategy among native speakers of English in this study. The t-test result shows that there are no statistically significant differences between the use of *thanking*, *imposition* and *alreters*

strategies between native speakers of Farsi and native speakers of English; however, the use of other strategies is significantly different for the native speakers of English and Farsi (see appendix).

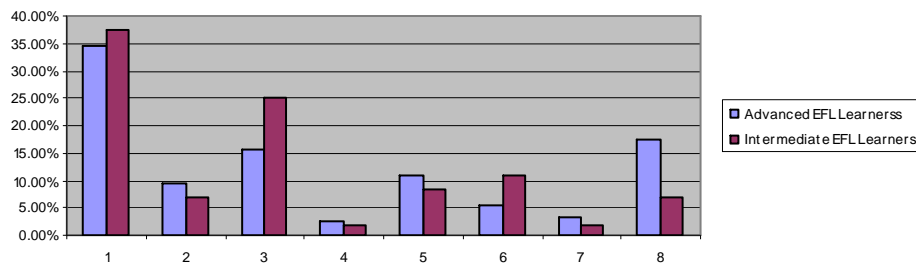
Table 7: Frequency of preferred strategies for native speakers of Farsi and native speakers of English

Strategy \ Respondents	Native speakers of English (n=10)	Native speakers of Farsi (n=10)
Thanking	60.15% (n=77)	36.60% (n=77)
Appreciation	22.65% (n=29)	2.90% (n=6)
Positive feelings	1.55% (n=2)	26.70% (n=56)
Apology	0.80% (n=1)	5.25% (n=11)
Recognition of imposition	1.55% (n=2)	5.70% (n=12)
Repayment	0.80% (n=1)	7.60% (n=16)
Alerters	0% (n=0)	3.80% (n=8)
Attention getters	12.50% (n=16)	11.45% (n=24)

To answer the second research question, i.e. what is the relationship between Iranian EFL learners' pragmatic competence and level of proficiency, first a comparison between two groups of learners at different levels of language proficiency is needed. Figure 2

shows the overall distribution of the thanking strategies produced across situations by EFL learners in intermediate and advanced levels of proficiency. For both groups, *thanking* strategy and *positive feelings* are the first and second most frequently used strategies.

Figure2: Frequency of overall use of strategies for Intermediate and Advanced EFL learners



Note: 1 = thanking, 2 = appreciation, 3 = positive feelings, 4 = apology, 5 = recognition of imposition, 6 = repayment, 7 = others, 8 = alerters.

Figure 2 shows that advanced EFL learners resort to *appreciation*, *apology*, *imposition*, and *alerters* strategies more than intermediate EFL learners while intermediate EFL learners use more *thanking*, *positive feelings* and *repayment* strategies.

Table 8: Frequency of preferred strategies for Advanced and Intermediate EFL Learners

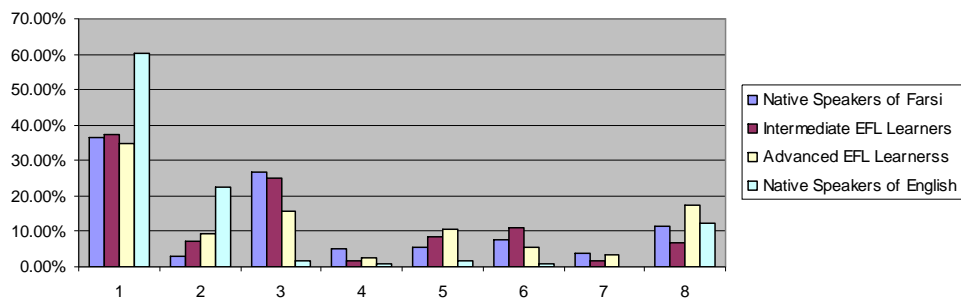
Respondent \ Strategy	Advanced EFL learners (n=10)	Intermediate EFL learners (n=10)
Thanking	34.70% (n=80)	37.40% (n= 58)
Appreciation	9.50% (n=22)	7.10% (n=11)
Positive feelings	15.60% (n=36)	25.10% (n=39)
Apology	2.60% (n=6)	1.90% (n=3)
Recognition of imposition	10.80% (n=25)	8.30% (n=13)
Repayment	5.60% (n=13)	10.90% (n=17)
Other	3.40% (n=8)	1.90% (n=3)
Alerters	17.30% (n=40)	7% (n=11)

The result of the independent t-test shows that there are no statistically significant differences for the use of strategies except for *alerters* between the intermediate and advanced level of language proficiency learners (see appendix).

Figure 3 shows a descriptive demography of thanking strategies in the four groups of respondents. As indicated in Figure 3 *thanking* is the most frequently used strategy for all groups under study. *Positive feelings* is the second most frequently used strategy for intermediate EFL learners and native speakers of Farsi. *Appreciation* is the second most frequently used strategy for native speakers of English while they use positive feeling

strategy less than EFL learners and native speakers of Farsi. In addition, EFL learners and native speakers of Farsi make more *apology*, *recognition of imposition*, and *altermers* in comparison with native speakers of English.

Figure 3: Frequency of overall use of strategies for Intermediate and Advanced EFL learners, native speakers of Farsi and native speakers of English



Note: 1 = thanking, 2 = appreciation, 3 = positive feelings, 4 = apology, 5 = recognition of imposition, 6 = repayment, 7 = othesr, 8 = alerters

The results of the independent t-test shows that there are statistically significant differences in the use of *positive feelings* and *repayment* strategies between native speakers of English and the two groups of language proficiency learners. There is also a statically significant difference in the use of *imposition* between native speakers of English and advanced EFL learners.

Discussion

The major findings of the first research question are as follows: Iranian and American respondents use the same type of strategies in responding to the fourteen item questionnaires; however, they differ in the frequency of use of these strategies. That is, the American respondents resort to fewer strategies in expressing gratitude in comparison with Iranian respondents. The use of *thanking* and *appreciation* as the first and second most frequently used strategies respectively, by native speakers of English can be attributed to respondents' cultural values. As a 'super-egalitarian' society (Wierzbicka, 1991), Americans believe that all people are equal and should have the same rights and opportunities. According to Apte (1974), the value of egalitarianism has been suggested as the cause of frequent thanks in daily interactions in the United States, and therefore, people explicitly acknowledge gratitude toward everything that is done for them with verbal thanks. On the other hand, Iranian society is reported to be a traditionally non-egalitarian society (Beeman, 1988). Thus, a speaker chooses his/her strategy based on the hierarchical differences (e.g. social status, social distance) between the speaker and his/her hearer(s). That is, their choice of strategy is dependent on whether they are expressing gratitude to a professor, a classmate, a close friend, or a stranger (see the questionnaire in the appendix).

The findings to the second research question show that there are no statistically significant differences in type or use of strategies used by Iranian intermediate and advanced EFL learners. Therefore, it can be assumed that there is no correlation between language proficiency and use of strategies. Besides this, there are no statistically significant differences between EFL learners' and Americans' responses and this can mean that EFL learners' pragmatic competence is towards L2 norms. The only strategy in the use of which EFL learners and native speakers of English differ significantly is the use of *positive feelings* which means EFL learners in overusing this strategy exhibit pragmatic transfer since this strategy is common in Farsi. However, further study with a

larger population is needed in order to examine whether foreign language learners who are only exposed to a target language via input inside the classroom can acquire L2 pragmatic competence, i.e. knowledge of what to say to whom and when appropriately.

Pedagogical implications

The importance of teaching pragmatics has manifested from the findings of some scholars who have shown that learners' responses are significantly different from native speakers in the area of language use which includes the application and comprehension of certain speech acts (Bardovi-Harlig, 1996, 1999; Kasper and Schmidt, 1996 cited in Bardovi-Harlig, 2003). Being grammatically proficient does not necessarily guarantee a concomitant pragmatic proficiency (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Kasper, 1997). That is, even grammatically advanced learners may use language inappropriately and show differences from target language pragmatic norms (Eslami-Rasekh, Eslami-Rasekh, Fatahi, 2004).

Foreign language learners' pragmatic competence in a target language is usually gained from the limited input inside the classroom. Studies on pragmatic instruction in language classrooms have shown that pragmatics can be taught (Kasper, 1997; Rose and Kasper, 2001). This is especially important to curriculum developers and syllabus designers in order to improve the teaching material in a way that will help expose foreign language learners to authentic target language in the classroom.

Materials for teaching pragmatics should be based on the analysis of socio-cultural deviations which identify the performance of non-native speakers when using a target language (Tanck, 2002). With regard to the findings of this study, Iranian EFL learners should be aware of the similarities and differences between English and Farsi in terms of the strategies used to express gratitude in the two cultures. This awareness can be achieved through a variety of classroom drills and exercises that involve realization of the target speech act in different situations (Umar, 2004).

Conclusion

The present pilot study focused on the interlanguage pragmatic development of expressions of gratitude by two small groups of Iranian EFL learners at two levels of language proficiency by comparing and contrasting their written responses to a Discourse Completion Task with the realizations of expressions of gratitude by ten Iranian native speakers of Farsi and ten American native speakers of English. The analysis shows the extent to which EFL learners' use of strategies reflected the influence of the first language and/or the mastery of target language. It also focuses on how different levels of English proficiency affect students' choice of strategies.

There are number of limitations to the study. First, due to the relatively small number of Iranian EFL learners, the findings can not be generalized to all Iranian EFL learners. Besides, this study has only employed one instrument for data collection. It is recommended that in order to get more authentic data and add to the reliability of the findings further studies with a larger population and more instruments be utilized.

Despite the limitations, the present pilot study presents significant findings. First, Iranian native speakers of Farsi are significantly different from native speakers of English with regard to the use of thanking strategies. Iranian respondents of this study use more thanking strategies in comparison with their American counterparts. However, except for *imposition* and *positive feelings*, there are no statistically significant differences in thanking strategies used by native speakers of English and EFL learners. There are also no statistically significant differences in the use of thanking strategies between the two groups of EFL learners as language proficiency increases. These findings suggest that language proficiency does not affect EFL learners' use of strategies when expressing gratitude in the English language.

References

- Apte, M. L. (1974). "Thank you" and South Asia languages: A comparative sociolinguistic study. *Linguistics*, 136, 67-89.
- Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words*: Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bachman, L. (1990). *Fundamental considerations in language testing*: Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bardovi-Harlig, K. (1996). Pragmatics and language teaching: Bringing pragmatics and pedagogy together. In L. F. Bouton (Ed.), *Pragmatics and Language Learning* (pp. 21-39). University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign: Division of English as an International Language.
- Bardovi-Harlig, K. (1999). Exploring the Interlanguage of Interlanguage Pragmatics : A Research Agenda for Acquisitional Pragmatics. *Language Learning*, 49(4), 677-713.
- Bardovi-Harlig, K. (2001). Evaluating the empirical evidence : Grounds for instruction in pragmatics? In K. R. Rose & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Pragmatics in Language Teaching* (pp. 13-32). Cambridge: Cambridge.
- Bardovi-Harlig, K., & Mahan-Taylor, R. (2003). *Teaching Pragmatics*. Washington, DC: United States Department of State.
- Barron, A. (2003). *Acquisition in Interlanguage Pragmatics : Learning how to do things with words in a study abroad context*: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Beebe, L. M., & Takahashi, T. (1989). Do you have a bag? Social status and patterned variation in second language acquisition. In S. M. Gass, C. Madden, D. Preston & L. Selinker (Eds.), *Variation in second language acquisition: Discourse and pragmatics* (pp. 103-128). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

- Beeman, W. O. (1988). Affectivity in Persian Language Use. *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*, 12, 9-30.
- Blum-Kulka, S. (1982). Learning how to say what you mean in a second language: A study of the speech act performance of learners of Hebrew as a second language. *Applied Linguistics*, 3, 29-59.
- Blum-Kulka, S., House, J., & Kasper, G. (Eds.). (1989). *Cross-cultural pragmatics: Requests and apologies*: Norwood, N.J.: Ablex.
- Bodman, J., & Eisenstein, M. (1988). May God increase your bounty: The expression of gratitude in English by native and non-native speakers. *Cross Current*, 15(1), 1-21.
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness : Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*, 1(1), 1-47.
- Canale, M. (1983). From communicative competence to communicative language pedagogy. In J. C. Richards & R. Schmidt (Eds.), *Language and communication* (pp. 2-27). London, etc.: Longman.
- Cheng, S. W. (2005). An exploratory cross-sectional study of interlanguage pragmatic development of expressions of gratitude by Chinese learners of English. Unpublished PhD dissertations. The University of Iowa.
- Chomsky, N. (1965). *Aspects of the theory of syntax*. Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press.
- Cohen, A. (1996). Speech Acts. In S. L. McKay & N. H. Hornberger (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics and language teaching* (pp. 383 - 420): Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Coulmas, F. (Ed.). (1981). *Conversational routines : Explorations in standardized communication situations and prepatterned speech*. The Hague: Mouton.

Eisenstein, M., & Bodman, J. W. (1986). "I very appreciate": expressions of gratitude by native and nonnative speakers of American English. *Applied Linguistics*, 7(2), 167-185.

Eisenstein, M., & Bodman, J. W. (1993). Expressing gratitude in American English. In G. K. S. Blum-Kulka (Ed.), *Interlanguage pragmatics* (pp. 64-81): New York: Oxford University Press.

Eslami-Rasekh, Z., Eslami-Rasekh, A., & Fatahi, A. (2004). The Effect of Explicit Metapragmatic Instruction on the Speech Act Awareness of Advanced EFL Students. *TESL-EJ*, 8(2).

Hinkel, E. (1994). Pragmatics of interaction: Expressing thanks in a second language. *Applied Language Learning*, 5(1), 73-91.

Hymes, D. (1966). *On communicative competence*. Paper presented at the Research Planning Conference on Language Development among Disadvantage Children.

Hymes, D. H. (1972). On communicative competence. In B. Pride & J. Holmes (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics* (pp. 269-293). Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Kasper, G. (1996). Introduction: Interlanguage pragmatics in SLA. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 18(2), 145-148.

Kasper, G. (1997). Can pragmatic competence be taught? *Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, Second Language Teaching and Curriculum Center* Retrieved August, 3rd, 2006, from <http://www.nflrc.hawaii.edu/NetWorks/NW06/NW6citation.html>

Kasper, G., & Blum-Kulka, S. (Eds.). (1993). *Interlanguage Pragmatics*: Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kasper, G., & Dahl, M. (1991). *Research Methods in Interlanguage Pragmatics*. University of Hawai'i at Manoa: Second Language Teaching & Curriculum Center.

Kasper, G., & Schmidt, R. (1996). Developmental Issues in Interlanguage Pragmatics. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 18(2), 149-169.

Kumar, I. (2001). *Expressions of Politeness and Gratitude : Towards a General Theory*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers.

Leech, G. (1983). *Principles of Pragmatics*. London: Longman.

Nguyen, M. T. T. (2005). *Criticizing and Responding to Criticism in a Foreign language : A Study of Vietnamese Learners of English*. Unpublished Dissertation. The University of Auckland, Department of Applied Language Studies and Linguistics.

Olshtain, E., & Cohen, A. D. (1989). Speech act behavior across languages. In H. W. Dechert & M. Raupach (Eds.), *Transfer in language production* (pp. 53-67). Nonwood, NJ: Ablex.

Rose, K. R. (2000). An exploratory cross-sectional study of interlanguage pragmatic development. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 22(27), 27-67.

Rose, K., & G. Kasper, G. (Eds.). (2001). *Pragmatics in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rubin, J. (1983). How to tell when someone is saying “no” revisited. In N. Wolfson & E. Judd (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics and language acquisition* (pp. 10-17): Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

Saville-Troike, M. (1996). The ethnography of communication. In S. L. McKay & N. H. Hornberger (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics and language teaching* (pp. 351-382). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Searle, J. R. (1976). A Classification of Illocutionary Acts. *Language in Society*, 5, 1-24.

Takahashi, S. (1996). Pragmatic transferability. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 18, 189-223.

Takahashi, T., & Beebe, M. (1987). The development of pragmatic competence by Japanese learners of English. *JALT Journal*, 8, 131-155.

Takahashi, T., & Beebe, L. M. (1993). Cross-linguistic influence in the speech act of correction. In G. Kasper & S. Blum-Kulka (Eds.), *Interlanguage Pragmatics* (pp. 138-157). New York: Oxford University Press.

Thomas, J. (1983). Cross-cultural pragmatic failure. *Applied Linguistics*, 4(2), 91-112.

Umar, A. (2004). Request Strategies as Used by Advances Arab Learners of English. In *Um Al-Qura Journal of Social Sciences*: Umm Al-Qura: Umm Al-Qura University Press.

Valle, A. B. (1998). Input and Interlanguage: a review of the research. *Estudios Ingleses de la Universidad Complutense*, 6, 129-159.

Wierzbicka, A. (1991). *Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: The Semantics of Human Interaction*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Appendix A

Discourse Completion Task (Questionnaire adopted and adapted from Cheng (2005))

1. You are walking to class. You accidentally drop your papers and notes, which scatter all over the middle of a busy hallway. A student whom you don't know is walking by and stops to help you pick up your papers and notes. When the student gives the papers and notes to you, what do you say?

2. You have arranged to meet a friend at a restaurant in a town where you have never been before. You arrive at the town a little late and since you have never been there before, you can't find the restaurant. Desperate to find it, you ask an elderly person passing by for directions. After the person tells you how to get there, what do you say?

3. You are in class. You need to take notes, but you can't find a pen. You ask a classmate, whom you don't know very well, sitting beside you to lend you one. After class, when you return the pen, what do you say to your classmate?

4. You are having trouble with your computer; it keeps crashing. You know someone at school who knows a lot about computers and you ask the person to help you even though the two of you are not close friends. The person hesitates because he/she is very busy, but then agrees to help you, and ends up spending the whole afternoon fixing your computer. After the computer is fixed, what do you say?

5. Next week, there is a test in your hardest class. Your friend, whom you know very well, is getting all A's, while you are struggling to pass. You ask your friend to help you study for the test and your friend agrees. After going over the material for 4 hours with

6. your friend, you understand much more and feel confident about the upcoming test. Before you leave, what do you say to your friend?

7. You are writing a term paper for one of your courses. There is a book you need to read to complete the paper. You go to the library, but the book has been checked out. Fortunately, a friend of yours, whom you know very well, has a copy of the book and offers to lend it to you for a few days. When you return the book, what do you say to your friend?

8. You were sick and missed class last week. You feel better and go to class today. You ask your close friend, who is in the same class, to lend you the notes from last week to make copies. Your friend agrees to lend you the notes. When you return the class notes, what do you say?

9. You and your friend, whom you know very well, go out for lunch. When you go to pay for your lunch, you can't find your wallet. Then you realize that you left it at home. Your friend offers to pay for your lunch. After your friend pays for your lunch, what do you say?

10. Usually you walk home after class. But today it is raining hard and you don't have an umbrella. You see that your friend, whom you know very well and who lives near you,

is getting ready to leave. You ask your friend for a ride and your friend agrees. When the car stops in front of your house, what do you say?

11. You are writing a term paper for one of your courses. You are working hard on the paper, but you have to stop because you also have to study for final exams in your other courses. The paper is due tomorrow, and you need a few more days to finish it. You decide to ask Professor C., whom you don't know very well, for an extension. Professor C. hesitates because it won't be fair to other students in class, but then he/she agrees to give you an extension. A few days later, when you turn in the paper, what do you say to Professor C.?

12. You want to apply for a university abroad and it requires recommendation letters from three professors. You have already asked two professors whom you know very well to write letters. Although you don't know Professor D. very well, you decide to ask Professor D. to write a letter for you because you took a course with him/her last semester. Professor D. agrees to write the recommendation letter for you. A few days later, when you meet with Professor D., he/she tells you that he/she has sent out the recommendation letter, what do you say|?

13. There is a midterm exam in two weeks, but you have to miss class that day because you are scheduled to present a paper at a conference and will be out of town. You ask Professor F., whom you don't know very well, if you can take the exam on a different day. Professor F. hesitates because he/she is very strict about attendance, but finally agrees to let you take the exam before you go to the conference. When you complete and submit the exam, what do you say to Professor F.?

14. You are writing a term paper for one of your courses. For this paper, you borrow a book from Professor A., whom you know very well. You are supposed to return the book to Professor A. tomorrow. However, you need to keep it for another 2-3 days to complete your paper. So you ask Professor A. if you can keep the book for a few more days, and he/she agrees. When you return the book to Professor A., what do you say?

15. There is a midterm exam in two weeks, but you have to miss class that day because you have an important job interview and will be out of town. You ask Professor B., whom you know very well, if you can take the exam on a different day. Professor B. hesitates because he/she is very strict about attendance, but finally agrees to let you take the exam earlier. When you complete and submit the exam, what do you say to Professor B.?

Appendix B

Statistical analysis

A. Independent *t*-test for native speakers of English and native speakers of Farsi

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Thanking	Equal variances assumed	1.491	.238	.000	18	1.000
	Equal variances not assumed			.000	16.717	1.000
Appreciation	Equal variances assumed	2.749	.115	-3.242	18	.005
	Equal variances not assumed			-3.242	13.926	.006
Positive feelings	Equal variances assumed	11.447	.003	7.245	18	.000
	Equal variances not assumed			7.245	10.388	.000
Apology	Equal variances assumed	27.123	.000	2.387	18	.028
	Equal variances not assumed			2.387	10.083	.038
Imposition	Equal variances assumed	11.121	.004	2.027	18	.058
	Equal variances not assumed			2.027	9.632	.071
Repayment	Equal variances assumed	14.645	.001	5.267	18	.000
	Equal variances not assumed			5.267	11.482	.000
Other	Equal variances assumed	18.000	.000	2.449	18	.025
	Equal variances not assumed			2.449	9.000	.037
Alerters	Equal variances assumed	6.926	.017	1.331	18	.200
	Equal variances not assumed			1.331	15.157	.203

B. Independent *t*-test for intermediate and advanced levels of language proficiency

		Independent Samples Test				
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Thanking	Equal variances assumed	.208	.654	1.994	18	.062
	Equal variances not assumed			1.994	17.953	.062
Appreciation	Equal variances assumed	2.942	.103	1.955	18	.066
	Equal variances not assumed			1.955	15.776	.069
Positive feelings	Equal variances assumed	2.909	.105	-.578	18	.570
	Equal variances not assumed			-.578	16.190	.571
Apology	Equal variances assumed	2.567	.127	1.116	18	.279
	Equal variances not assumed			1.116	15.997	.281
Imposition	Equal variances assumed	2.289	.148	1.318	18	.204
	Equal variances not assumed			1.318	15.437	.207
Repayment	Equal variances assumed	.107	.747	-.844	18	.410
	Equal variances not assumed			-.844	18.000	.410
Other	Equal variances assumed	3.675	.071	1.387	18	.182
	Equal variances not assumed			1.387	12.758	.189
Alerters	Equal variances assumed	2.218	.154	2.351	18	.030
	Equal variances not assumed			2.351	16.095	.032