The Effect of Using Video Games on EFL Learners' Acquisition of Speech Acts of Apology and Request

Mahshid Shirazi

English Department, Faculty of Humanities and Foreign Languages, Hamedan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Hamedan, Iran

Seyyed Dariush Ahmadi

English Department, Faculty of Humanities and Foreign Languages, Hamedan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Hamedan, Iran

Ali Gholami Mehrdad

English Department, Faculty of Humanities and Foreign Languages, Hamedan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Hamedan, Iran

Abstract—This article presents a discussion about the inclusion of video game based pragmatic competence instruction as a facilitative tool to develop interlanguage pragmatic competence of Iranian EFL learners' acquisition of speech acts of apology and request. The question this article is intended to answer includes: whether using video game as a facilitative tool for developing interlanguage pragmatic competence have any effect on EFL learners' acquisition of speech acts of apology and request or not. To answer this question, 40 Iranian intermediate EFL learners were selected via administering the Oxford Placement Test (OPT). Following the Jianda Liu pragmatic competence test (2004) that made test of apology and request speech acts were administered as the pre-test before the targeted speech acts were instructed to them for 8 sessions. The post-test of apology and request speech acts were then administered and data were analyzed via calculating ANCOVA and Mann-Whitney U test. The results indicated that the video game-based instructed EFL classroom showed positive progress in acquisition of apology and request speech acts.

Index Terms—video games, acquisition, speech acts, apology, request

I. INTRODUCTION

Teaching pragmatics, which refers to the production and comprehension of a communicative act or speech act at any situation (Eslami-Rasekh and Liu, 2013), seems to be a challenging task for teachers to cope with. Studies addressing the realization of speech acts by second or foreign-language learners have found that knowing the syntax and the semantics of the language by learners, even at high levels of proficiency, does not guarantee success in comprehending and producing all nuances of language meaning. The problem has led to a shift from a grammar focus towards a communication focus which emphasizes the appropriate use of language in communicative contexts (Eslami-Rasekh & Liu, 2013).

Performing acts, including "apologizing" or "requesting", through linguistic expressions is argued to be the core of human communication in Searle's (1969) speech act theory. Searle divided speech acts into five categories which included assertive, directives, commissives, expressive and declarations. Bardovi-Harlig (2001) stated that "using textbooks cannot be counted as a reliable source of pragmatic input for classroom language learners" (p. 25). Due to the problems in handling the use of speech acts, EFL researchers and instructors showed an interest towards the implementation of the technology use in the classroom to overcome the difficulty in teaching L2 pragmatics and speech acts (Tatsuki & Nishizawa, 2005). This has led to what is referred to as multiliteracy which includes the knowledge of how to use the new technologies, including the computer, in the educational settings. Therefore, the traditional language classroom is slowly changing with the advances and increasing uses of technology (Nguyen, 2008) into what is known as blended learning (Horton, 2000).

Additionally, according to Pereira (2013), video games, often called digital games by researchers and educators, are serious and are ever more becoming recognized as valid educational tools. Prensky (2007) stated that video games and their use in education, referred to as digital game-based learning (DGBL), have been an area of increased research, and are gaining recognition as a viable medium for serious learning. As suggested by scholars (e.g., Mubireek, 2003; Prensky, 2007; Shokri & Abdolmanafi-Rokni, 2014), video games could be harnessed, in various ways, to serve learning purposes in educational environments. As such, an adventure genre video game- The Walking Dead- was used, in the present study, to see whether it could help Iranian EFL learners learn the speech act of apology and request.

A. The Significance of the Study

In these days, most of people around the world are trying to learn another language in order to be successful in different aspects of life. According to (Hamid, 2009, as cited in Trang, Moni and Baldauf, 2012) it is indisputable that English plays a very important role as a global language. English as an international language is a tool for communication without which our main goal of teaching and learning English will be fruitless (Hamidi & Khodareza, 2014). Because of the importance of English in today's world, learners are strongly motivated to learn the language (Trang, et. al, 2012, as cited in Long et. al, 2013).

Key to English language programs, English textbooks are thought to have failed to provide learners with enough authentic language practice opportunities as it is said that they do not offer native-speaker-produced language samples (Vellenga, 2004, as cited in Mahdavian & Shahrokhi, 2014). The problem becomes more eminent in environments, like the Iranian context, whereby the use of new technologies has been neglected.

As technology could provide more opportunities for authentic, or, at least, semi-authentic communication in the target language, learners could be directed or guided to use its facilities in and outside the learning environments (Chirimbu & Tafazoli, 2013). The use of computer presents EFL learners with a gateway to various activities for developing their language skills.

Among the technology tools, computer games might help as an appropriate tool to create a suitable language learning environment for the learners (Mich, et.al, 2004, as cited in Abu Bakar & Nosratirad, 2013). According to Aghlara and Hadidi Tamjid (2011, as cited in Ebrahimi & Zamanian, 2013), through playing digital games, even the shyest students participate in language learning.

Moreover, video games as an instructional tech tool are advised to be used in the language learning classrooms. Ferguson, Cruz, and Rueda (2008) pointed out that language teachers are advised to use video games in their classrooms. Furthermore, video games can be useful for teachers to make the atmosphere of their classes more exciting and meaningful (Shokri & Abdolmanafi Rokni, 2014) than ever. Providing interactivity among the gamers and between the game players and the elements of the game (DeHaan, et al., 2010, as cited in Vahdat & Rasti Behbahani, 2013), video games might both entertain and (help) train learners to become proficient language users as well.

The name of the video game which was used in this study was "The Walking Dead" by the adventure genre of video games and was chosen for the EFL learners' of Experimental group in this research. ESL and EFL language learning needs to be supported with meaningful learning tools, for example computer games, so that learning can be more realistic and meaningful. Because of the objectivity associated with computer assisted language learning, in testing students' performance, this kind of task (using video games in EFL contexts) can have a positive influence, too. In addition, teachers can monitor their students meticulously (Shokri & Abdomanafi Rokni, 2014). Therefore, it was thought that the use of the video games in the EFL/ESL context can be helpful for teachers and their students in teaching and learning a new language.

B. Statement of the Problem

As EFL learners determine to learn the English language, it takes a long time and also it is hard to acquire it in a fluent way. According to Riasati (2011), foreign language learning can be a demanding task for many language learners. As mentioned above, in the previous section, a variety of factors, including age, attitude, anxiety, aptitude, intelligence, learning achievement, motivation and personality (Lehmann, 2006, as cited in Zainol Abidin, Pour-Mohammadi & Alzawari, 2012), can affect the learning process. Feeling anxious in a foreign language learning environment might make the language learning experience less enjoyable which can lead to affecting the learners' performance negatively (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2005, as cited in Riasati, 2011).

Speaking is among the skills that prove to be difficult for learners who wish to manifest their ability in the use of language. Preparing students to use the language productively is a demanding task requiring skill and effort as well as the use of available tools by the language teachers to offer enough input to the learners (Bygate, 1987).

As the EFL learners may have some errors in the grammar or using the target language new words, they do not speak in the foreign language very much. Because, they think that they may be fleered by their classmates in this situation. So, in the traditional way of instructing in the classroom, they do not speak as much as they can. Then, the atmosphere of the classroom has to be in a way that, the EFL learners are motivated, and do not get exhausted from the classroom atmosphere. Iacob (2009) pointed out that children up to 12 usually enjoy learning, but not in a monotonous environment. According to Iacob, sitting down and focusing on one person or a book page sounds to be unnatural for the children, at least. The book, having colored pages, might look appealing for the first few moments, but being static demotivates the young learners and causes them to lose interest because the position turns out to be a passive one soon (Iacob, 2009).

Due to the problems mentioned above and in order to help EFL learners cope with the problems of anxiety, demotivation, disinterest and inattention as well as the possibility of the computer games to help children maintain their attention and stimulate their motivation to participate actively in educational effort in and outside the classroom work, the present study tried the use of video games in developing the learners' acquisition of the speech act of apology and request. Video games, in language learning, use repetition (behaviorism) and processes of organization of thought and adaptation (constructivism) (Ang and Zaphiris, 2006, as cited in Vahdat & Rasti Behbahani, 2013). Thus, this study

took a glance at the supposed problem to find out if using video games affects EFL learners' acquisition of speech acts of apology and request. There are studies that concentrate on "using video games", "acquisition" and "speech acts" in relation to other issues, but none of them has considered the effect of using video games on these two categories yet.

C. Research Question

The following question is going to be posed in this study:

Does using video games (The Walking Dead) have a significant effect on EFL learners' acquisition of the speech acts of apology and request?

D. Null Hypothesis

H: using video game does not have significant effect on EFL learners' acquisition of speech acts of apology and request.

II. REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

A. Video Games

Video games, prepared for gamers to play, are considered to be electronic games occurring on a screen or any other electronic device (Seppänen, 2008, as cited in Lukkarinen, 2013).

Not solely designed for entertainment purposes, serious games, even, are receiving increasing attention today. It is probably because many areas could take advantage of the experience of playing games designed to help people in various therapeutic and explicitly educational contexts (Poels, Annema, Zaman, & Cornillie, 2012). Materializing reality in simulated worlds which, if well constructed, are not just about facts or isolated skills, but embody particular social practices, video games can, thus, make it possible for players to participate in valued communities of practice and, as a result, help develop the ways of thinking that organize those practices" (Gee, et. al, 2004).

Gee (2007) and others (Koster, 2005; Prensky, 2006), have argued compellingly that well-designed video games incorporate principles of effective learning, and that educators should harness these principles as well as games themselves in order to help students learn. Gee, Halverson, Shaffer, Squire (2004, as cited in Lymbery, 2012) pointed out that the virtual worlds of games are rich contexts for learning because they make it possible for players to experiment with new and powerful identities. According to Jared Baierschmidt (2012), interest in using video games for the teaching and learning of second languages has been increasing steadily over the past decade.

B. Acquisition

Acquisition is considered an implicit process taking place when the language is used for communication (Krashen, 1981). Furthermore, he maintains that acquisition takes place when learners attempt to convey meaning. Language acquisition is thought to be the process of acquiring the linguistic and communicative competence by learners who are in direct exposure to the target language and the formal language instruction (Ellis, 1999, as cited in Tuan and Nhu, 2010).

According to Littlewood (1984, as cited in Abukhattala, 2013), one of the different ways of developing skills in a second language is acquisition, a supposedly subconscious similar to that through which native tongues are acquired. Emphasizing the meaning or the message content, the new language is deemed to be internalized through acquisition which seems to be untutored or naturalistic (Abukhattala, 2013).

According to Abukhattala (2013, grammar rules or rules of usage have been taught instead of facilitating acquisition of English in the classrooms. It is necessary to change the type of activities performed in class in order to help students develop an accurate, automatic, and long-lasting second language. According to Abukhattala (2013), acquisition is a subconscious process, picking up the learning, results in accuracy and fluency, formal, available for automatic production, and traditional teaching does not helps it. Moreover, designing acquisition techniques turn out, at least at present, to be more difficult (Abukhattala, 2013) which might be made easier through the use of new tools.

C. Speech Acts

Speech acts are communicative activities or acts of communication- a very important part of pragmatics- in any language.

Also, Austin (1962) supposes that a speech act looks quite like an utterance as a functional unit in communication and also stated that using an utterance is both saying something and doing that thing. Speech acts are performing things along with the use of words. They include asking, thanking, ordering, promising, requesting, warning, challenging, threatening, and so on (Austin, 1962, as cited in Youssef, 2012). When we speak and perform things at the same time, we are dealing with speech acts; the interpretations and negotiations we make while speaking deals with speech acts; and, when everything including context and discourse are included, we are talking about speech acts (Schmidt and Richards, 1980).

Also, Yule (2006) declares that, speech acts do not only contain words and grammar but they also convey actions. Cohen and Olshtain (1993, as cited in Istifçi, 2009) pointed out that L2 learners are thought to face problems in using speech acts while communicating with the target language native speakers because speech acts are complicated to be used by the L2 learners as speech acts are conditioned by social, cultural, situational and personal factors. Foreign or

second language learners make use of the rules of their first languages when they speak in the foreign/second language which leads to communication breakdown or communication conflict.

D. Apology

Apologies have been studied by numerous researchers. An apology is a gesture through which a person goes through two stages. In the first stage, (s)he finds her/himself guilty for an offence and in the second stage, (s)he dissociates itself from the deficit and affirms a belief in the offended rule (Goffman, 1971, as cited in Scher & Darley, 1997). The three acts that may follow apologies are: (a) relief; (b) appreciation; and (c) minimization. Expressions such as: 'You're welcome', 'That's all right', 'Think nothing about it', 'It's okay' are most common minimizing remarks used in American speech when terminating the exchange (Goffman, 1971, as cited in Adrefiza & Jones, 2013).

As Goffman (1971) asserts, "these remarks indicate an acceptance of apologies, while 'OK' or 'all right' without deictic 'that's' or 'it's' can be identified as an acknowledgement of an apology" (as cited in Adrefiza & Jones, 2013, p. 74). The act of apologizing requires an action or an utterance which is intended to "set things right" (Olshtain and Cohen, 1983). Bergman and Kasper (1993) maintained that the purpose of apology is to re-establish social relation harmony after the offense is committed. Apologies are expressive illocutionary act which can be differentiated from complaint, which are also expressive acts, by being convivial in nature (Trosbog, 1994).

According to Hornby (2000), the word apology is a statement by the meaning of saying sorry for something that has been done wrong or causes a problem.

E. Request

Becker (1982, as cited in Youssef, 2012) pointed out that, in our everyday communications, people are always asked to do things. Others might be asked to provide us with something, or to perform actions for us. These are all requests. Requests are utterances intended to denote the speaker's desire to regulate the behavior of the listener, to make him/her do what the speaker intends him/her to perform. Searle (1979, as cited in FeLix-Brasdefer, 2010) urges the fact that, depending on the context or situation, the requests can be considered direct (during which the speaker makes his or her point clearly) or indirect.

The concept of request is important because it helps us understand how a society is maintained through its peoples's everyday conduct (Youssef, 2012).

III. METHODOLOGY

The participants of the study contained 40 EFL learners who were selected from among 100 EFL learners of an institute in Tehran via administering an OPT test. The participant group was given a pretest of speech acts including Multiple Choice Questionnaire (MCQ) for apology and request. The groups were treated with the apology and request speech acts for 8 sessions. In the first step, that of researching, the participants in experimental group were introduced to the walking dead video game for being familiar with this in order to play it in the next sessions. They were also explained what either speech acts are, especially apology and request or what is the difference between apologies and requests. After this explanation, learners were asked to make some examples about these in their mother tongue in different situations and the researcher makes those examples in the target language which is English for them.

On the other hand, in control group, in the first step, that of researching, the participants in control group were introduced to the Institute's exclusive book, workbook and CD for being familiar with them in order to work with them in their class in the next sessions. They were also explained what either speech acts are, especially apology and request or what is the difference between apologies and requests. After this explanation, learners were asked to make some examples about these in their mother tongue in different situations and the researcher makes those examples in the target language which is English for them.

In the second step, the researcher started to make a group discussion about the course material in order to check the EFL learners' existence knowledge of speech acts and after that she taught speech acts and types of it like apology and request to them by a pamphlet which was gathered by her from some sources. This step was equaled in both experimental and control group.

After that, in experimental group, they (the participants) moved on to the third step, which was game playing round. In this step, EFL learners were asked to play with the video game and do not ask any question from each other in order to being quiet until the end of game playing and at the end ask their questions from the researcher. Also, they were asked to write down the dialogues of characters in the game in order to find the apology and request ones.

Moreover, EFL learners in control group were moved on to the third step, which was course content instruction. In this part, the researcher (teacher) started to teach the exclusive institute book units to EFL learners. Each unit includes parts like Conversation, Reading, Listening, and Grammar through Drills, Check it out, Glossary and Workbook Exercises.

The Conversation which has a subject title asks some questions from the learners about its title in order to answering them by EFL learners in order to know their ideas about the related subject. Before this part starts, the researcher gives a warm-up about the subject of it to the EFL learners, in order to think and answer to the question of this part better. A Dialog by a subject title is the next part of the book unit. Before playing the CD of the book for this part, the teacher

gives a warm-up about the subject of the dialog and asks about the EFL learners experiences in that field in order to help them to imagine themselves on that situation. Reading part that first includes some questions for discussing by the EFL learners at the classroom and answer to them. After that, there is a Passage by a subject title which is exist for the EFL learners in order to read by themselves and in the next part, answering to the Comprehension check part by 2 models of questions which includes Multiple choice questions and True or False part. Before this part starts, the researcher gives a warm-up about the title of it to the EFL learners, in order to think and answer to the questions of this part. After they read the reading part and answering to all of the related questions of the reading part, the teacher asks them to read their answers one by one in the class and if they answered in a wrong way, she corrects their wrong answers one by one. Listening part that includes 2 columns named A and B. Column A includes some words that their meaning was found in the column B, and the EFL learner had to match the meanings of the words to the words. Before playing the CD of the book for this part, the teacher gives a warm-up about the subject of the listening part and also after that asks the EFL learners to listen to the question of this part by the played audio in order to answer the question correctly. Grammar through Drills part that includes some grammar notes, and also some questions about this grammar point that the EFL learners had to answer after that. In this part the teacher write the grammar formula on the board of the class and make an example of it in order to make the grammar part easy for understanding of the grammar contents. Check it out part that includes some new words, Idioms and Expressions in order to learn in each unit. In this part, the teacher read the words in a correct way of spelling and after that gives the meaning of the new words, expressions and idioms of this unit to the EFL learners and also makes an example for new words.

In the fourth step, in experimental group, the learners were asked to have conversations about the game playing with each other (their peers) and ask their questions about game playing from each other and at last make a conclusion about it. At last, the teacher (researcher) started to make a conclusion about the played episode of the video game for EFL learners in order to solve their problems in understanding the texts of the video game for learners.

On the other hand, in control group, in the fourth step, the learners were asked to have conversations about the institute exclusive book materials (contents) with each other (their peers) and ask their questions about the exercises from each other and at last make a conclusion about it. At last, the teacher (researcher) started to make a conclusion about the instructed course contents for EFL learners in order to solve their problems in understanding the new contents of it, either grammar or new words to them.

Finally, the group was given a posttest of the speech acts of the study including Multiple Choice Questionnaire (MCQ) for apology and request. The data gathered for the hypothesis of the study that was analyzed via applying the ANCOVA and Mann-Whitney U test.

IV. RESULTS

A. Descriptive Analysis of the Data

The data of the present study were descriptively analyzed via using the SPSS software; and the summary of findings have been presented in tables 1 to 7 as follows:

TABLE 1.
DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE APOLOGY AND REQUEST (SPEECH ACTS) VARIABLES IN THE STUDY

	N Statistic	Minimum Statistic	Maximum Statistic	Mean Statistic	Std. Deviation Statistic	Skewness Statistic	Std. Error	Kurtosis Statistic	Std. Error
Pretest	40	25	70	53.75	9.041	-.921	.374	1.792	.733
Posttest	40	65	120	87.25	17.466	.431	.374	-1.254	.733
Group	40	2	3	2.50	.506	.000	.374	-2.108	.733
Valid N (listwise)	40								

Table 1 illustrates the means and the standard deviations of the Request variable of the study. As is seen, the difference between the means of the pretest and the posttest of the study is not significant; also, there is more variety among the posttest scores regarding this variable. Also, the value of Skeweness and Kurtosis as indicated in Table 1 were (-.921 and 1.792) for pre-test and the value of Skeweness and Kurtosis as indicated in Table 1 were (.431 and -1.254) so the normality of data was observed.

TABLE 2.
KOLMOGROV- SMIRNOV AND SHAPIRO-WILK'S TEST OF NORMALITY FOR EXPERIMENTAL GROUP AND CONTROL GROUP
Tests of Normality

	Group	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Pretest	Experimental	.343	20	.000	.746	20	.000
	Control	.217	20	.015	.851	20	.006
Posttest	Experimental	.174	20	.116	.949	20	.355
	Control	.281	20	.000	.855	20	.006

In table 2, the Kolmogrove-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk's tests of normality indicated that the data were not distributed normally. Table 2 illustrates the value of *P* in experimental group pre-test was ($P = 000$) and in comparison group pre-test was ($P = .006$). The value of *P* in experimental group post-test was ($P = .355$) and in comparison group post-test was ($P = .006$). Therefore, the normality of data in experimental group and control group was not observed. So, ANCOVA could not be run.

TABLE 3.
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR KURTOSIS AND SKEWNESS GAIN SCORES FOR EXPERIMENTAL GROUP AND COMPARISON GROUP

	N Statistic	Minimum Statistic	Maximum Statistic	Mean Statistic	Std. Deviation Statistic	Skewness		Kurtosis	
						Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Gain Score	40	5	90	33.50	24.992	.629	.374	-.702	.733
Group	40	2	3	2.50	.506	.000	.374	-2.108	.733
Valid N (listwise)	40								

Table 3 illustrates the value of Skeweness and Kurtosis which were (.629 and -.702), because the value of Skeweness and Kurtosis were between -2 and +2, it was assumed that the data was normal.

TABLE 4.
KOLMOGROV- SMIRNOV AND SHAPIRO-WILK'S TEST OF NORMALITY FOR EXPERIMENTAL GROUP AND COMPARISON GROUP

	Group	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Gain Score	Experimental	.188	20	.062	.882	20	.019
	Control	.309	20	.000	.842	20	.004

The Kolmogrove-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk's tests of normality indicated that the data were not distributed normally. The Significance *P*>.05 indicated that the data are normal. Table 2 illustrates the value of *P* in experimental group gain score which was ($P = .019$) and in comparison group gain score which was ($P = .004$). Therefore, the data were not distributed normally to run t-test. The results indicated that the data in this study were not parametric, because the normality of data was not observed. In order to examine the differences between experimental group and comparison group, non-parametric test was allowed. So, the Mann-Whitney U test was run.

Descriptive data related to Mann-Whitney U test for gain scores were illustrated in Table 5. The mean ranks and the sum are illustrated in Table 6, too.

B. Inferential Analysis of the Data

The inferential analysis of the data of this study was done through calculating the Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) between the pretest and the posttest of each participant group separately. The summary of findings here has been presented in tables 5 to 7 below:

TABLE 5.
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR GAIN SCORES IN EXPERIMENTAL GROUP AND COMPARISON GROUP

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Gain Score	40	5	90	33.50	24.992
Group	40	2	3	2.50	.506
Valid N (listwise)	40				

TABLE 6.
MEAN RANKS AND SUM OF RANKS FOR GAIN SCORES IN EXPERIMENTAL GROUP AND COMPARISON GROUP

	Group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Gain Score	Experimental	20	30.50	610.00
	Control	20	10.50	210.00
	Total	40		

Table 6 illustrates the mean scores of the experimental group (mean rank = 30.50) is significantly higher than comparison group (mean rank = 10.50) therefore to check Mann-Whitney U test is run to check its significance.

TABLE 7.
MANN-WHITNEY U TEST FOR GAIN SCORES IN EXPERIMENTAL GROUP AND COMPARISON GROUP
TEST STATISTICS

	Gain Score
Mann-Whitney U	.000
Wilcoxon W	210.000
Z	-5.483
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

Table 7 illustrates that the Mann-Whitney U test for groups differences is significant (U = .000, $P < .000$, Z = -5483).

V. Discussion

The findings of this study as a result of descriptive and inferential analyses of the data contribute to final comments on the hypothesis of the study.

Accordingly, the hypothesis of the study i.e. 'using video games does not have significant effect on EFL learners' acquisition of speech acts of apology and request was rejected.

The rationale behind such a rejection comes from the evidence in tables1 and 3. Tables 2 and 4 provide the data necessary to show the rejection of the hypothesis.

The results of this study may bring the research to the point that Iranian EFL learners' acquisition of speech acts of apology and request can be affected by using video games in classroom. As a result, the findings of the current study are expected to lead to devising new teaching materials that enhance English language speech acts acquisition. They are also expected to result in devising new teaching methods that include techniques to teach learners how to work to produce and use English as a foreign language.

Finally, the findings of the current study should contribute to using new teaching approaches that will enable language teachers to direct their language teaching techniques towards the use of language attributes that teaching them through their acquisition of new things or contents in foreign language like speech acts of English language.

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Mahshid Shirazi was born in Tehran, Iran, in 1988. She received his B.A. degree in English Language Translation from KIAU, Alborz, Iran, in 2010, and her M.A. degree in TEFL from the Islamic Azad University, Hamedan, Iran respectively. Currently, she is working as an English instructor. Her main areas of interest are CALL, acquisition and speech acts.

Seyyed Dariush Ahmadi was born in Kermanshah, Iran, in 1973. He received his B.A. degree in English Language Translation from the IAUH, Hamedan, Iran, in 1995, and his M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in TEFL from the Islamic Azad University, Khorasgan (Isfahan) Branch and Islamic Azad University, Tehran Science and Research Branch respectively. In 1998, he joined the English Department, IAUH, as a Lecturer. He is now the head of the English Department there. His current research interests include Writing, CALL, MALL and Multi-literacies. Dr. Ahmadi is a Fellow of the Kermanshah JDKU Institute of Higher Education, Iran; the Institute of Higher Education for the Water and Power Industry, Kermanshah, Iran; and the English Editor of the Quarterly Journal of Knowledge and Information Management published in Persian. He has published several papers in local and international journals. He has also had several presentations at local and international conferences.

Ali Gholami Mehrdad is a lecturer in the Department of English at Islamic Azad University, Hamedan Branch, Iran. He has compiled a two-volume course for pre-requisite and general English classes, has done research on EFL students' learning styles and strategies as well as EFL writing , has translated books and has published more than 20 articles in leading ESL/EFL journals. His research interests include ESP, EFL writing instruction, learner variables, collaborative language practice, task-based language instruction, and dynamic assessment.