EFL Students' English Pragmatic Knowledge: Evidence from University of Guilan[*]

Sahar Moradi
University of Guilan, Iran

Maryam Danaye Tous
University of Guilan, Iran

Abdorreza Tahriri
University of Guilan, Iran

Abstract—This study aimed to investigate the extent of Iranian EFL students' pragmatic knowledge, and if there were any significant differences among EFL learners at different years of study (the freshmen, the sophomores, and the seniors) on this knowledge. To this end, 78 EFL students of University of Guilan (Rasht-Iran) were tested using a Multiple-choice Discourse Completion Test (MDCT), (Birjandi & Rezaei, 2010). The results showed that, their extent of pragmatic knowledge wasnot at satisfying level. Also, the results showed that there were significant differences between the freshmen and seniors in this regard.

Index Terms—English pragmatic knowledge, speech acts, request, apology

I. INTRODUCTION

For many years, the purpose of language teaching was to make language learners familiar with grammatical rules and huge amount of foreign words. But, gradually, teachers understood that English language students lacked the ability to communicate successfully in the foreign language (FL) in spite of being mastered at English grammar and vocabulary (Krisnawati, 2011). According to Hymes (1972), communicative ability to use a language in concrete situations is as important as linguistic competence which subsumes phonological, syntactic, and semantic subsystems. He believed that a normal child acquires not only knowledge of language but also how to use it in different context. "Communicative competence consists of grammatical competence as well as sociolinguistic competence, that is, factors governing successful communication" (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 9).

SPEAKING is an acronym that Hymes (1972) used to introduce those factors:

Setting refers to the time, and place of a speech act.

Participants refers to the speaker and hearer.

Ends refers to the goal, purpose, or objectives of the communication.

Act sequence refers to the form, content, and order of the event.

key refers to the tone, manner, or spirit of the speech act.

Instrumentalities refers to the form and style of the speech act.

Norms refers to the principles of interaction and interpretation based on a shared social rules.

Genre refers to the kind of speech act or event (lecture, poem, report, etc.).

According to Bachman & Palmer (1996), pragmatic knowledge is assumed as one area of language knowledge. It focuses on "how utterances or sentences and texts are related to the communicative goals of the language user and to the feature of the language use setting" (p. 68).

Barron (2003) defined pragmatic competence as:

knowledge of the linguistic resources available in a given language for realizing particular illocutions, knowledge of the sequential aspects of speech acts and finally, knowledge of the appropriate contextual use of the particular languages' linguistic resources (p. 10).

Amaya (2008) stated:

…, Teachers should provide students with the necessary tools to make adequate pragmatic decisions in the second language (L2). Students must learn that the codification of a certain message is subject to the conventions of use and these can vary from one linguistic community to another (p. 20).

A. English Pragmatic Knowledge- Interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) focuses on language learners' knowledge of the target language norms and how they apply this knowledge in the performance of speech acts in L2 (Putz & Aertselaer, 2008). ILP is the L2 users' matter of concern. It is much more limited in comparison with pragmatics that could be

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[*] A University located in Rasht which is the center of Guilan province (Iran)

assumed as a subfield of pragmatics (Bardovi- Haring, 2010). Pragmatics is one of the most important factors which helps L2 learners develop their communicative competence. L2 learners must be informed that being highly proficient in the areas of grammar, vocabulary, and four main skills of language learning (reading, listening, speaking, and writing) is necessary but not enough for them to be called perfect language learners. They definitely would have difficulty in interacting with English native speakers which is mostly due to cross-cultural differences. It is assumed that language teachers do not focus on pragmatic points which is one of the considerable part of the language (Castillo, 2009). Language learners may make errors in their communication and fail to express themselves quite clear or understand the intended meaning of the speaker or writer, although they are perfect language learners (Thomas, 1983).

Baba (2010) worked on the ILP of indirect complaint among Japanese ESL learners. The study investigated that how Japanese ESL learners express their emotions when they want to use the speech act of indirect complaint and what points should be considered by them in this situation. The results were compared with native Japanese and native English speakers. It was concluded that Japanese ESL learners don't show much aggression in comparison with native Japanese speakers or native English speakers. It may be due to lack of competence in their L2. The four strategies used by Japanese ESL learners were as follows: accommodation to L2 patterns, L1 negative transfer, overgeneralization of English language rules, and avoidance of using specific L2 features.

Jianda (2006) recognized that ILP knowledge is teachable and it is necessary and beneficial to raise the EFL learners' consciousness in this area. The reason which makes teachers unwilling to work on this aspect of L2 is mostly lack of a good method for testing the EFL learners in term of ILP. It is believed that gathering data from both native and non-native English speakers would be helpful for making test items. 89 Chinese EFL learners (31 of them were at tertiary level and 58 of them were at the first level) participated in this study. The findings revealed that teaching ILP in class is very important and EFL teachers and testers should consider it in their language teaching and testing programs.

B. Speech Acts- Austin (1975) presented the speech act theory which had three elements: 1. Locutionary act which is the utterance itself 2. Illocutionary act which is the intended meaning of speaker/writer 3. Perlocutionary act which is the effect of an utterance on the listener or reader according to the context. "The most important component of a speech act is the illocutionary act" (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p.10). Levinson (1983) divided speech act theory into two parts: direct and indirect. In direct speech act, speakers make themselves quite clear in their speech. For example, 'Turn off the TV'. But in indirect speech act, speakers say something in a way that cannot be easily interpreted by others. According to Searle (1975), in indirect speech act "the speaker communicates to the hearer more than he actually says by way of relying on their mutually shared background information, both linguistic and non-linguistic, together with the general powers of rationality and inference on the part of the hearer" (pp. 60-61). For example, "I like my food quite salty" (Spencer- Oatey & Zegarac, 2010, p.76) instead of saying 'give me the salt'. Speech acts construct a great part of pragmatics. People try to express themselves not only with words, grammatical and structural patterns of language but also with doing actions via those utterances. For example, when a teacher tells his student that "You failed", it means that you did not get the least required score in that course and should take the course again (Yule, 1996).

…, the basic assumption [for "action"] is that when humans use language, they act both in and on the world. Human beings use language to create obligations and new social relations as well as do such things as reassure, promise, and apologize (Locastro, 2012, p. 21).

Mulyanah (2013) worked on the intercultural pragmatic failure in terms of Yes-No answer to a question. The result showed that Indonesian people are hard to be understood in such cases. They say 'No' when they really mean 'Yes' and reply 'Yes' when they really mean 'No'. They believed that it is rude to talk quite frankly. For example, if you offer them something, they immediately refuse it till you repeat your offer again and again. This is so complicated for English native speakers because they can't understand what they really mean. Those who are not familiar with Indonesian culture think that they really mean 'No' when they say 'No', therefore, pragmatic failure happens. Sometimes, they forcefully and as a sign of politeness accept what you offer them, but finally they try to evade it. This is rude in English culture. Western people express their wants obviously and without complication.

Eliciting data from 120 Saudi and Yemeni males through MDCT, Al-Zubeiry (2013), recognized that Arab EFL learners highly use culture-specific expressions which cause troubles in cross-cultural communication and miscommunication happens. "Three related approaches - ethnography of communication, pragmatic failure and conversational Analysis - were reviewed so as to get insights into understanding such a phenomenon" (p. 69). The conclusion was that; Arab EFL learners should be made aware of the misuse of the culture- specific patterns while communicating in L2. They should also keep in mind that EFL pragmatic knowledge is very much needed for communicating in L2 and linguistic competence is not enough alone.

Han and Burgucu-Tazegul (2016) worked on the perception of speech acts of refusals by Turkish EFL learners in the use of speech act of refusals, and the effects of L2 proficiency on pragmatic transfer. The data was gathered through oral role plays. The results showed that indirect strategies were used mostly by L2 learners, although, pre-intermediate group used more direct strategies in comparison with upper-intermediate group. Turkish EFL learners considered the status more in comparison with English native-speakers' group. L1 pragmatic transfer influenced their use of refusal strategies. In addition, the more they increase their L2 language proficiency, the less, L1 pragmatic transfer was seen in their using of refusal strategies. So, upper-intermediate level behaved more native-like.

Kia and Salehi (2013) worked on the effect of explicit and implicit instruction on the pragmatic development of Iranian EFL learners in the area of thanking and complimenting. The participants were 46 Sharif university of Technology students in upper-intermediate level. They were freshmen who enrolled in general English classes. They were tested by MDCT after eight-session instruction. The results showed that explicit instruction is highly effective on the development of pragmatic competence of thanking and compliment speech acts. Students' language proficiency level doesn't guarantee that they can express native–like expressions of thanking and complimenting. Besides, grammatical and pragmatic correlation is not changed by explicit/implicit instruction of English thanking and complimenting.

C. Request- Trosborg (1995), defined speech act of request as "an illocutionary act whereby a speaker (requester) conveys to hearer (requestee) that he/she wants the requestee to perform an act which is for the benefit of speaker" (p. 187). Requests are "attempts on the part of the speaker to get the hearer to perform or to stop performing some kind of action in the interests of the speaker" (Ellis, 2012, p. 172). Speech act of request is important to those who study in the area of speech acts. "This importance is due to the complexity in relationships between its form, meaning, as well as pragmatics and the critical social risks involved for speakers" (Alemi & Khanlarzadeh, 2016, p.21).

Tamimi Sa'd and Mohammadi (2014) did a cross-sectional study of request perspectives among Iranian EFL learners, the strategies they use in the speech act of request and the request perspectives they apply. The role of gender was considered in this research. They chose thirty Iranian MA students of English (15 males and 15 females) as participants. Data gathering procedure was done by discourse completion task. Six situations were designed in this DCT, each pair for one social status or relative power. Mood-derivable, query-preparatory, and strong hints were the most frequent strategies used by the participants. No major difference was observed between males and females in this regard. In addition, hearer-oriented perspective of request was mostly frequent among the participants in comparison with other request perspectives such as speaker-oriented, speaker-hearer-oriented, and impersonal which was due to language transfer from L1 or the first interaction with this type of perspective. Finally, it was mentioned that Iranian language learners need pragmatic instructions, so it should be considered in their English teaching program.

Shim (2013) conducted a study about how requestive emails from the Korean students are perceived by international faculty members. In appropriateness of an academic email some factors such as format, language forms, and the content are involved. 150 rqequestive emails were selected and evaluated by three professors. In addition, 40 messages were randomly chosen and the professors talked about their reasons of positive or negative perception for these messages. The results showed that students' (native and more specifically, non-native students) emails don't follow the politeness norms that are expected from an academic email. This failure can be due to "student's insufficient pragmalinguistic knowledge, improper assumption about the institutional rights and obligations, a transfer of text messaging practices, and simple carelessness" (p. 127). The researcher suggested two solutions for overcoming this failure: One solution is that students learn how to write a suitable academic email as a part of the curriculum. The other solution is inserting the guide-lines for writing a good academic email on the university website.

Aribi (2012) conducted a sociopragmatic study on the use of speech act of request by Tunisian EFL learners. Findings revealed that they used different types of requests (direct or indirect) according to the various social factors such as the power differential, the distance-closeness relationship and the degree of imposition of the request on the requestee. The greater the power differentiation, the greater the distance and the greater the ranking of imposition of request, the more careful and indirect the requester would be. In addition, their background knowledge and L1 influenced the kind of request they used.

D. Apology- Istifci and Kampusu (2009) believed that speech act of apology is culture-specific. Juhana (2011) stated:

An apology is a speech act used when the behavioral norm is broken. When an action or utterances has resulted that one or more persons perceives themselves as offended, the guilty person(s) needs to apologize. The speech act of apologizing aims at maintaining, restoring, and enhancing interpersonal relationship. …, An apology serves compensatory action to an offence which the guilty person admits guilt to what he has done and asks for the speaker's forgiveness (p. 2).

Bagheri and Hamrang (2013) worked on the effect of meta-pragmatic instructions on the interpretation and use of apology speech acts of English on Iranian intermediate EFL learners. The participants were 60 English students of Shokouh English institute in Rasht, Iran. All the volunteers were asked to participate in Oxford placement test (OPT) to make sure that they are homogeneous in terms of language proficiency. This test includes 50 items and those who got above 25 scores could go on the other steps of this study. Subjects were divided into two groups (control and experimental). All of them were given a pre-test. The participants in experimental group went under 10 sessions of treatment. The results showed that language learners are not aware of the appropriate use of the speech acts according to the context. They believed that some instructional course is beneficial in this case. EFL learners raise their consciousness in this area by explicit instruction. In addition, the suitable material should be provided for teaching pragmatic aspects of an L2.

Zangoei and Derakhshan (2014) investigated the role of awareness- raising instruction in Iranian EFL learners' perception of speech act of apology and their preferred learning styles. The results of an MDCT (as both pre and post-tests) verified the positive effects of instruction in developing the comprehension of speech act of apology. In addition,

the data gathered by this test revealed no difference in learners' preferred learning style before and after the treatment except for 'the expression of satisfaction in English progress'.

Although, many studies have been conducted on pragmatic issues, more works are needed to investigate the various pragmatic choices made by L2 learners in different situations. Therefore, this study aimed to feel the gap in literature regarding the assessment of EFL students' knowledge of speech acts of apology and request related to the language classes. It also investigated whether or not, there were significant differences among EFL learners of different years of study in this case. To this end, the following research questions were addressed:

1- What is the extent of English pragmatic knowledge of Iranian EFL students (in this case just the speech acts of request and apology related to the language classes)?

2- Are there any significant differences among EFL students of different years of study in terms of pragmatic knowledge (in this case just the speech acts of request and apology related to the language classes)?

And this is the hypothesis of the study:

There are no significant differences among EFL students of different years of study in terms of their English pragmatic knowledge (in this case just the speech acts of request and apology related to the language classes).

II. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design- It was a quantitative research. The English pragmatic knowledge of Iranian EFL students (here by pragmatic knowledge, we mean their knowledge of speech acts of apology and request) was measured using a Multiple-choice Discourse Completion Test (MDCT, Birjandi& Rezaei, 2010). Iranian EFL students' scores in MDCT was assumed as the dependent variable and different years of study (the freshmen, the sophomores, and the seniors) was considered as the independent variable.

B. Participants- The participants of the study were 78 Iranian BA English students of University of Guilan at three years of study (forty freshmen, eighteen sophomores, and twenty seniors). Their age range from 18 to 24, and their mean age was 21.

C. Research Instrument and Procedure- To collect the required data, Multiple Discourse Completion Test (MDCT), (Birjandi & Rezaei, 2010) has been used in this study. It contained twenty multiple-choice items. Each item defined a situation. Participants needed to choose the best answer which suited to that specific situation. All these items tested students' pragmatic knowledge in terms of speech acts of apology and request related to the language classes.

The data collection procedure was done by the researcher. Data was collected from EFL students of four BA classes in the faculty of Humanities, University of Guilan. Each class had the capacity of almost twenty students. The anonymity and confidentiality were ensured before starting the data gathering procedure. It took 10 minutes for them to complete the MDCT.

III. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

One point was given to each correct answer, and no points for incorrect answers, for a total of 20 points. One- way Analyses of variance was run to the results of the MDCT. Before running this test, tests of the underlying assumptions were done. The first assumption was the assumption of independence. That is, it should be confirmed that the groups were independent of each other. As, it was obvious from the design of the study, the groups (i.e., the freshmen, the sophomores and the seniors) were independent of each other. Moreover, the assumption of normality for the independent variable (i.e. three years of the study, i.e., the freshmen, the sophomores and the seniors) was also examined. To test the assumption of normality, the Shapiro-Wilks test, which is typically tested at ($\alpha = .01$) level of significance was used. The standardized Skewness measure of normality was also used in conjunction with the Shapiro-Wilk test to check the normality assumption (See Table 1).

TABLE 1
TESTS OF NORMALITY FOR THE PRAGMATIC TEST

	Levels of study	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
pragmatic knowledge test scores	freshmen	.135	40	.065	.957	40	.131
	sophomores	.127	18	.200	.982	18	.968
	seniors	.174	20	.114	.904	20	.049

The p value for the pragmatic test of the freshman group was .131, that for the sophomores was .968, and for the pragmatic scores of the seniors the p value was .049. Given the aforementioned p values for the Shapiro-Wilks test and using $\alpha = .01$, it was concluded that each of the levels of the independent variable (i.e., different years of the study including the freshmen, the sophomores, and the seniors) were normally distributed. Therefore, the assumption of normality had been met for this sample. Besides, the normality of the distributions was examined through computing Skewness and Kurtosis values and obtaining trimmed means that presented the normal distribution of this variable, too.

TABLE 2
STATISTICS FOR THE PRAGMATIC TEST SCORES

	Levels of study			Statistic	Std. Error
Pragmatic knowledge test scores	freshmen	Mean		14.30	.397
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	13.49	
			Upper Bound	15.10	
		5% Trimmed Mean		14.38	
		Skewness		-.613	.374
		Kurtosis		.053	.733
	sophomores	Mean		14.44	.543
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	13.29	
			Upper Bound	15.59	
		5% Trimmed Mean		14.43	
		Skewness		.064	.536
		Kurtosis		.015	1.038
	seniors	Mean		12.40	.772
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	10.78	
			Upper Bound	14.01	
		5% Trimmed Mean		12.44	
		Skewness		-.036	.512
		Kurtosis		-1.57	.992

To compute the trimmed means, first, 5 percent of the highest and lowest cases were removed and a new mean score was calculated. Then, the main mean values and the trimmed means were compared to investigate the possible differences between the two means for the pragmatic test scores. The findings showed that the extreme scores did not affect the means. These results implied that, since the trimmed means and the mean values were nearly the same for the pragmatic test scores, the values were not too different from the remaining distribution, and thus the normality assumption was established. Moreover, the values of the Skewness and kurtosiswere divided by their related std. Error. The resultant z values were within the range of ($\pm$1.96) indicating the uniformity of the distributions.

After examining the normality assumption, the test of homogeneity of variances provided the Levene's test to check the assumption that the variances of the three groups were equal; i.e., They were not significantly different. It was shown that the Levene's test was not significant for the pragmatic test scores; $F_{pragmatic\ test\ scores}$ (2, 75) = 5.069, p = .059 at .05 alpha level. Thus, the assumption of homogeneity of variance was met for the samples.

TABLE 3
TEST OF HOMOGENEITY OF VARIANCES FOR THE PRAGMATIC TEST SCORES

Pragmatic knowledge test scores			
Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
5.069	2	75	.059

The Levene statistics confirmed the hypothesis that the group variances were almost the same (see the following error bar graphs).
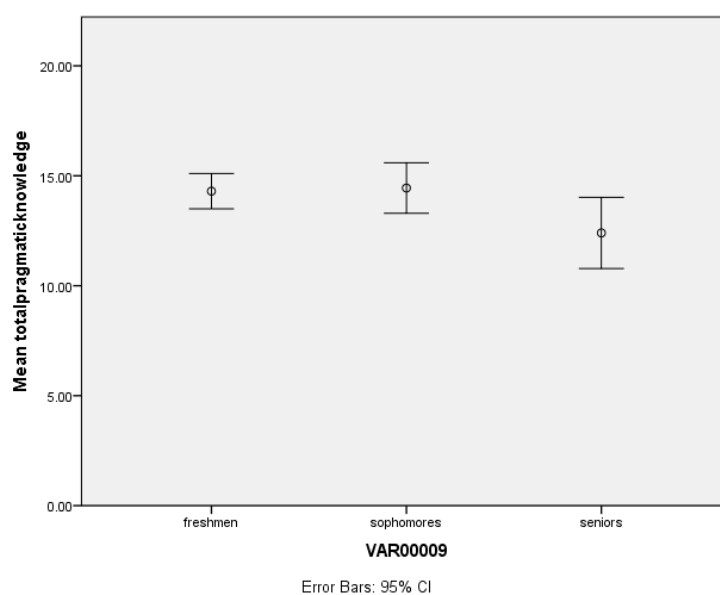

Fig. 1 Error bars for examining the homogeneity of variances assumption

As it was displayed in the above figure, the degree of the variation in the participants' performance was similar simultaneously. After verifying the uniformity of the variance across the three groups, descriptive statistics of the three groups for the pragmatic test scores were computed.

Table 4 displays the descriptive statistics for the pragmatic test including group size, mean, and standard deviation, minimum and maximum scores for the three groups of students on the dependent variable that was the pragmatic test scores.

TABLE 4
GROUP STATISTICS FOR THE PRAGMATIC TEST SCORES OF THE THREE GROUPS (THE FRESHMEN, SOPHOMORES, AND THE SENIORS)

	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Min.	Max.
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
freshmen	40	14.30	2.51	.39	13.49	15.10	8.00	19.00
sophomores	18	14.44	2.30	.54	13.29	15.59	10.00	19.00
seniors	20	12.40	3.45	.77	10.78	14.01	7.00	17.00
Total	78	13.84	2.83	.32	13.20	14.48	7.00	19.00

The ANOVA table (Table 5) shows that the overall F ratio (3.760) for the ANOVA was significant (p = .028) at the .05 alpha level. So, the null hypothesis that all three groups' means were equal was rejected ($F_{pragmatic test}$ 2, 75 = 3.760, Sig. = .028 ≤ .05). It was concluded that at least one of the group means was significantly different from the others.

TABLE 5
ONE-WAY ANOVA FOR THE PRAGMATIC TEST SCORES

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	56.509	2	28.255	3.760	**.028**
Within Groups	563.644	75	7.515		
Total	620.154	77			

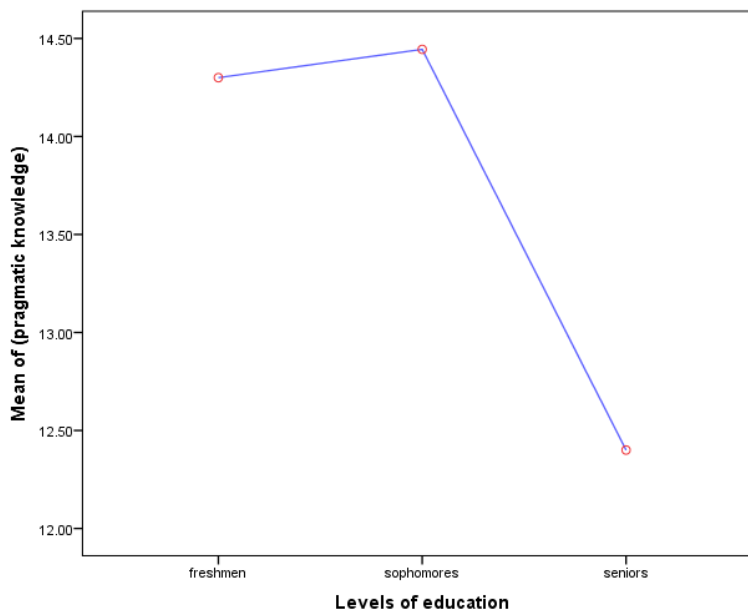The following figure clarifies the three groups' performance on pragmatic test.

Fig. 2 Mean plot for the results of the pragmatic test

The visual representation of the group means and their linear relationship was displayed in figure2. The plot showed notable differences among the three groups. In general, F statistics (Table 5) firmly showed that there were statistically significant differences among the three groups' means, and the means plot revealed the location of these differences. And based on table 3 we could say that sophomores outperformed their counterparts namely freshmen and seniors (mean $_{freshmen}$ = 14.30, mean $_{sophomores}$ = 14.44, and mean $_{seniors}$ = 12.40).

Consequently, a post hoc follow-up test was conducted to determine which means differed significantly from others. In other words, multiple comparisons Post- hoc test (Scheffe) was done to compare the means of the three groups.

TABLE 6
MULTIPLE COMPARISONS FOR THE RESULTS OF THE POST- HOC TEST

Multiple Comparisons

Dependent Variable: pragmatic knowledge

Scheffe

(I)	(J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
freshmen	sophomores	-.144	.77	.983	-2.08	1.79
	seniors	1.90*	.75	.046	.02	3.77
sophomores	freshmen	.144	.77	.983	-1.79	2.08
	seniors	2.04	.89	.078	-.17	4.26
seniors	freshmen	-1.90*	.75	.046	-3.77	-.02
	sophomores	-2.04	.89	.078	-4.26	.17

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

As it was displayed in Table 6, the highest mean difference was reported between the seniors and sophomores with mean difference of (2.04). In contrast, the lowest mean difference was shown for the freshmen and sophomores with (mean difference=.144). The significant difference was between the freshmen and seniors.

IV. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The highest pragmatic test score that could be obtained in this test was 20. The comparison between this score and the achieved mean scores (mean $_{freshmen}$ = 14.30; SD= 2.51; mean $_{sophomores}$ =14.44; SD = 2.30; mean $_{seniors}$ = 12.40; SD = 3.45 and the total pragmatic test scores of the EFL students (N $_{total}$ = 78; mean $_{total}$ = 13.84; SD = 2.83)), showed that the extent of Iranian EFL learners' pragmatic knowledge was not that much high. Although, the researcher could find no particular paper or thesis that worked exactly on this issue, there were some studies relatively similar to the present research. Findings of Ahmadi, Kargar, and Rostampour (2014) revealed that the speech act strategies used by Iranian EFL learners were not similar to the native patterns. It may be because of lack of English pragmatic knowledge or L1 negative transfer in this case. Findings of Saeidi, Yazdani, and Gharagozlou (2014) also revealed that L1 negative transfer caused inappropriate production of expressions and strategies by Iranian EFL learners.

A comparison among pragmatic test scores of the freshmen (mean $_{freshmen}$ = 14.30; SD = 2.51), the sophomores (mean $_{sophomores}$ =14.44; SD = 2.30), the seniors (mean $_{seniors}$ = 12.40; SD = 3.45), ((F ratio $_{pragmatic test}$ (2, 75) = 3.760; p = .028; Sig. = .028 $\leq$ .05) revealed that there were significant differences between the freshmen and seniors. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. So, the answer to the second research question is yes. Sophomores outweighed the other two groups in terms of the pragmatic test scores. In the second place, freshmen performed better than the seniors. Finally, the participants in the senior group performed lower than the other two groups. As far as the researcher knows, no particular study was found to compare pragmatic knowledge of EFL learners of different years of study. But, there were some similar researches which worked on pragmatic competence of EFL learners. Based on the findings of Mohebali and Salehi (2016), there is a negative relationship between language proficiency and pragmatic proficiency. It means that language proficiency should not necessarily be assumed as a sign of pragmatic proficiency. EFL learners can be mastered at language knowledge but have difficulty in pragmatic knowledge. In contrast, findings of Hamidi and Khodareza (2014) revealed that there is a strong positive correlation between language proficiency and pragmatic proficiency. It means that more grammatically proficient EFL learners, perform better in pragmatic test. Istifci and Kampusu (2009) compared advanced Turkish EFL learners with the intermediate ones in terms of speech act of apology. Although, some similarities and differences in comparison with the native norms were found in both groups, advanced learners performed better and nearer to the native patterns.

It is hoped that findings of the present study help all who are dealing with EFL teaching and learning. Language students may understand that EFL pragmatics are important and neglecting it could be troublesome. They would be aware that EFL pragmatic issues should be considered along with grammatical knowledge (grammar, vocabulary, and syntax). Language teachers may try to allot a certain time of their classes to discuss the pragmatic issues. Curriculum designers may specify some courses to EFL pragmatics. Material developers may include more pragmatic-oriented units and try to consider both linguistic and pragmatic aspects of the L2 equally in the textbooks.

This study investigated the Iranian EFL learners' pragmatic knowledge in terms of speech acts of request and apology related to the language classes. Further studies need to be done in this area considering other aspects of pragmatics. Additionally, pragmatic knowledge of EFL learners of different years of study were compared in this research. Pragmatic knowledge of EFL learners of universities and private institutes can be compared with each other in further research. The comparison can also be done between EFL learners of Azad University and the public one in the future research.

APPENDIX PRAGMATICS TEST: APOLOGY AND REQUEST

Please read each of the following situations. There are three responses following each situation. Please read the responses to each situation and decide which one is the BEST in each situation. The time allotted to answer the test is 10 minutes.

Situation 1

Suppose you are late for an important class and the teacher is very punctual and principled. How would you express your apology in this situation?

The Teacher: This is the third time you're late for this class. Next time I won't let you in.

You: ………………………………………………………………………………

a. I understand. I won't be late again.

b. Sorry but the important thing is that I attend, right?

c. Things happen in life, sorry.

Situation 2

You have been asked to hand in your project, and the time is due. However, you have not prepared it, and you want to make an apology for that. How would you express your apology in this situation?

The Teacher: I told you that there won't be an extension. Why didn't you prepare your term project?

You: ……………………………………………………………………………….

a. Sorry but I had too much other homework from my other projects to finish this one on time.

b. Well, I had some unexpected problems, so you should make an exception for me.

c. That's true. I'm sorry. I had some unexpected obstacles, but I understand that this is the policy.

Situation 3

You are almost asleep in the class while the teacher is teaching. The teacher gets very angry when he sees you sleeping in the class. How do you express your apology?

The Teacher: Did you sleep well last night?

You: …………………………………………………………………..

a. I'm sorry; I will try and not let it happen again.

b. I'm sorry, but I didn't sleep a wink last night.

c. Pardon me. I couldn't help it.

Situation 4

Your teacher is giving a lecture on an important topic. You have a related question to that part of his lecture. How do you interrupt your teacher?

The Teacher: …constructivist views are very important for…. (interruption)

You: ……………………………………………………………………………

a. I don't understand what you are talking about.

b. Sorry but I really don't understand what are you saying!

c. I'm sorry to ask but could you explain a little more?

Situation 5

Your cell phone suddenly starts ringing loudly amid a very serious discussion in the class. How would you apologize to the teacher?

The Teacher to the class: It is very important to respect each other's (the phone rings) views.

You: ……… ………………………………………………………………….

a. I'm sorry! This is an important call. I'll just step out for a moment.

b. (Immediately silencing the phone, which should have been silenced or turned off before the class meeting, and speaking in a very low volume so as not to increase the interruption)—I'm sorry.

c. Oh, no! I meant to turn my phone off at the beginning of the class!

Situation 6

You have an appointment with your family doctor and you need to leave early in order to be on time for your appointment with the doctor. How do you express your apology to your teacher when you ask for an early leave?

You: ……………………………… because this appointment is very important for my health.

The Teacher: No problem. Just don't forget to ask your classmates about the pages we will cover next session.

a. Excuse me. I am wondering if it would be OK for me to leave the class early for a doctor's appointment….

b. Excuse me! I have to leave now for a doctor's appointment.

c. I have to go now; please tell me whether I'll miss anything important.

Situation 7

Suppose that the teacher is teaching and you are talking to your classmate. The teacher gets angry with you. How do you express your apology?

The Teacher: Don't you think it is impolite to speak while I'm teaching?!

You: ………………………………………………………………………

a. I beg your pardon. I won't let it happen again.

b. OK OK…I guess you're right.

c. Excuse me. I didn't mean to interrupt you.

Situation 8

You are daydreaming in the class and lose track of what the teacher has said. At once, he asks you a question about the topic under discussion. You are totally unaware of what has been going on in the class. How do you apologize?

The teacher: What are you thinking about? Are you following me?

You: …………………………………………………………………………..

a. Sorry; I wasn't listening to you. What did you say?

b. I'm really sorry I got sidetracked for a moment.

c. I was thinking of something else; I don't understand what you are saying.

Situation 9

You are not ready for the class and you can't answer the questions asked by the teacher. How do you apologize for not being ready for the class?

The teacher: I told you several times that you must be always ready for the class. Why didn't you study this chapter?

You: …………………………………………………………………………….

a. I'm terribly sorry. I did study the material, but I am having trouble understanding it.

b. I didn't have time to do the reading.

c. I need to apologize and say that I had too much other work to do.

Situation 10

You borrowed a book from your teacher but you accidentally spilled a cup of coffee all over it. You return it to the teacher. How do you apologize to him/her?

The Teacher: (very angry) I can't believe it. This was the only copy I had.

You: ……………………………………………………………………….

a. Sorry, it was an accident, chill out.

b. I am deeply sorry. Please allow me to replace the copy.

c. I'm desperately sorry but accidents happen, you know?

Situation 11

Suppose you have not understood what the teacher has just explained about "simple past tense". How do you ask for explanations about the structure of this tense?

a. Should I ask you a question?

b. How can I ask you a question?

c. Excuse me sir, may I ask you a question?

Situation 12

Suppose you have a listening class and you cannot hear what is played on T.V. How would you ask your teacher to turn it up?

a. I'm sorry, but I cannot hear.

b. I'll ask you to turn it up.

c. What? Turn it up please.

Situation 13

Suppose the teacher is writing with a red marker on the board, and the color really disturbs your eyes. How would you request the teacher to use a different color?

a. Why are you writing with red! It's a pain in the neck.

b. I think you must use another color or I won't see anything on the board.

c. Excuse me; I can't read that color of pen; do you think that you could use another color when writing on the board?

Situation 14

Suppose you have been absent the previous session, and you have not understood a specific part on your own. How would you ask your teacher to give a brief explanation about that part?

a. Could you tell me what I missed last class?

b. Could you please review the grammar very quickly…

c. I don't understand the material from the previous class meeting.

Situation 15

The teacher has announced the date of midterm exam but you have another exam on that same day. How would you ask your teacher to change the date of the exam?

a. You need to change the date of the exam. We already have an exam on that day.

b. Could you please possibly take the exam some other day?

c. Couldn't we just not have the exam? We have one exam already on that day.

Situation 16

Suppose the teacher is using power point for teaching writing in the class. How would you ask your teacher for the power point file?

a. Is there any way that I could get a copy of the power point you used today to study with?

b. Professor, would it be possible for me to get a digital copy of those slides? You should e-mail those slides to the students.

c. Is it ok if I get a copy of your PowerPoint?

Situation 17

Suppose you have got 14 on your reading test and you are sure that your score must have been higher. How would you ask your teacher to check your paper again?

a. I know that I did better than 14. You must have made a mistake when you were grading.

b. I studied really hard for this test and I thought that I would do better than 14. Is there any way that you could review my test and double check my grade?

c. You need to recheck my test. I don't think that I got a 14 on this test.

Situation 18

Suppose you need a recommendation letter for teaching at an English language institute very urgently for tomorrow. How would you ask your teacher to do that?

a. Can you write me a recommendation letter? And I need it by tomorrow.

b. I wonder if you could possibly give me a recommendation letter for my workplace.

c. Could you please write me a letter of recommendation really quickly? The deadline is tomorrow and it's really important!

Situation 19

Suppose that you need to have your teacher's phone number in case you might have some questions while studying. How would you ask for his/her phone number?

a. Could you possibly provide me with a telephone number where I could contact you with questions I might have during the class?

b. I am going to need your telephone number so that I can call you with any problems I might have when I am studying.

c. Is it Ok if I ask for your phone number in case I face any problems while studying?

Situation 20

Suppose you want to have an appointment with the teacher this week for asking some questions about your term project. How do you ask him for an appointment?

a. Excuse me; are you available this week for me to ask a few questions about my term project?

b. Would you like to keep your appointment with me?

c. Do you mind if I arrange an appointment with you for this week?

Thanks for your participation

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Sahar Moradi was born in 1984. She is an MA student in TEFL at University of Guilan, Campus 2, Rasht, Iran. She has been working on interlanguage pragmatics for her MA thesis.

Maryam Danaye Tous has BA in TEFL from University of Guilan, 1996; MA in General Linguistics from Tehran University, 1999; and PhD in General Linguistics from Tehran University, Tehran, Iran, 2004. She is currently an assistant professor of University of Guilan.

Abdorreza Tahriri has BA in TEFL with distinction from University of Guilan, 2001; MA in TEFL with distinction from Shiraz University, 2003; and PhD in TEFL with distinction from Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran, 2010. He is currently an assistant professor at the English department of University of Guilan. His major research interests are differentiated instruction and L2 acquisition.