

# Improving Oral Fluency of EFL Students with Different Proficiency Levels through Explicit Instruction of Face Threatening Strategies

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**Abstract**—Meaning and interaction are the essential parts of socialization process in which the interlocutors try to mitigate and control the negative impact of face threatening acts. As such, the main objective of the present study was to determine whether explicit instruction of FTA strategies could lead to the improvement of EFL students' oral fluency with different proficiency levels. To achieve this end, from the targeted population of 350 undergraduate students majoring in English translation at Isfahan (Khorasgan) Islamic Azad University, a sample of 100 intermediate and advanced students, 50 each, were chosen based on their scores on an OPT test. They were subsequently divided into four equal groups who were homogenized in terms of their oral fluency scores on an IELTS interview test used as the pre-test groups. From the four targeted groups, only the intermediate and advanced samples received the explicit instruction on FTA strategies whereas the no treatment groups were taught by a conventional approach. At the end of the treatment all samples were exposed to the post-test, a parallel form of another IELTS interview exam. The results indicated that the groups taught by explicit instruction of FTA strategies considerably outperformed those who had been taught by the conventional method.

**Index Terms**—face threatening strategies, oral fluency, explicit instruction, Face Threatening Acts (FTA), politeness strategy, English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

## I. INTRODUCTION

It seems that the concept of politeness is closely associated with such notions as face and face work. As Goffman (1967: 5) explains, face refers to “the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact”. However, this definition has been challenged by various scholars stating that it defies the role of culture and its influence on the issue. For instance, The African and Islamic cultures, being collectivist in nature, assume face to be a contextually defined phenomenon which carries a positive value in the eyes of the public. Notably, this perspectivization is quite different from the western cultures where individual differences are prominent in individualistic communities (Lim, 1994; Ho, 1994). However, it is interesting to note that the concept of face has a dynamic nature which can be fortified, maintained and even lost during daily encounters (see Vilkki, 2006).

It seems that FTAs may harm the face of either the addressor or the addressee by acting against their wants and desires. As Brown and Levinson (1987) put it, politeness strategies tend to lessen the threats posed by FTAs since their main purpose is to redress their damaging influences. These writers suggest four hierarchically privileged strategies that any speaker can use to minimize the harms evoked by FTAs. These strategies are: 1) bald on-record, 2) positive politeness, 3) negative politeness, and 4) off-record strategies. The order of using such strategies is important in that the more an act threatens speaker's or hearer's face; the more they tend to employ a higher-numbered strategy to handle the situation. The authors further suggest that face is a sense of positive identity and public self-esteem with which interlocutors tend to abide in various communicative events. As a consequence, face-threatening acts can lead to the loss of face for the parties involved in a social interaction. In such situations, the affected party usually resorts to certain linguistic strategies for alleviating the undesirable consequences of the face threats. For instance, discursive markers like hedges are one of the strategies whose function is to mitigate a face-threatening act (Bonneton & Villejoubert, 2005; Bonneton & Villejoubert, 2006).

Unsurprisingly, communicative acts evoking criticism or effrontery can threaten receivers' positive face by conveying disapproval or by delimiting the hearers' behaviors and their autonomy. FTAs are often expressed linguistically even though some writers like Trees and Manusov (1998) believe that they can also be conveyed through

body language. It seems that politeness theory originally assumed that positive and negative face threats naturally occur during social interactions simultaneously (see Penman, 1990; Wilson, Kim, & Meischke, 1991). As a case in point, a face threatening act such as criticism can threaten positive face by signaling disapproval; however, it may also threaten negative face by signifying that the act being criticized should be changed, and by so doing, it restricts the freedom of the receiver. In other words, different face threats may evoke different degrees of politeness depending on the conditions of the hearer, the social distance between the interlocutors, the authority of the addressee, the degree of implicature and the number of options available to the interactants.

Accordingly, Leech (p. 19) argues that the politeness principles dominating language use may be categorized as:

**1) Tact Maxim:**

- a) *Minimize cost to other*
- b) *Maximize benefit to other*

**2) Generosity Maxim:**

- a) *Minimize benefit to self*
- b) *Maximize cost to self*

**3) Approbation Maxim:**

- a) *Minimize dispraise of other*
- b) *Maximize praise of other*

**4) Modesty Maxim:**

- a) *Minimize praise of self*
- b) *Maximize dispraise of self*

**5) Agreement Maxim:**

- a) *Minimize disagreement between self and other*
- b) *Maximize agreement between self and other*

**6) Sympathy Maxim:**

- a) *Minimize antipathy between self and other*
- b) *Maximize sympathy between self and other*

Despite the significant role of politeness in communicative situations, Brown and Levinson (1987) contend that, beside politeness, every communicative act is fraught with perilous face threatening acts (Kasper, 1990). Moreover, they claim that considering other aspects of “face” may allow a broader view of the facts that can help to avoid the polarity splitting the concept into Positive and Negative politeness (Bargiela-Chiappini, 2003). This proclamation has won the support of various writers such as Ellis, (2008); Harris, (2003) and Kasper, (1990) since it provides a practical ground for demarcating between inter and intra-cultural gradations of social realities (see Bremner, 2006).

Naturally, since politeness is culture specific and it is realized differently in different languages, speakers’ sociopragmatic interlanguage may fail to discern the appropriate ways of handling politeness in contexts where the addressee has a divergent culture. It is clear that such problems may inadvertently lead to pragmatic failure. Kasper; Blum-Kulka (1993) define inter-language pragmatics as the study of non-native speakers’ application and acquisition of action generating linguistic resources in a second language (Rose, 2000). Although pragmatic performance studies are considerably large in the review of the related literature, it is believed that interlanguage pragmatic development has not received enough attention in the review of literature (Kasper & Rose, 1999). As Schmidt (1993) puts it, the discussion of how pragmatic abilities are acquired in a second language is still in its infancy.

Consequently, the swing of the pedagogical pendulum has been moving towards L2 pragmatics instruction as a fundamental component of second language teaching and learning (Bachman and Palmer, 2010). Under this new perspectivization, the role of teaching in the development of L2 pragmatics has received a lot of ink in the review of the literature (see Martinez- Flor et al, 2003; Kasper, 2001; Kasper & Rose, 2002). In general, the popular belief is that instruction on a variety of pragmatic features can benefit the learners considerably (Olshtain and Cohen, 1990; Takahashi, 2001; Rose and Ng Kwai-Fun, 2001, Safont, 2005).

Similarly, EFL students’ awareness of politeness strategies as a focal point in interlanguage pragmatics accentuated the pivotal role of language learners’ sensitivities concerning the explicit-implicit instruction of pragmatic knowledge (Ellis, 2005; Ellis et al., 2009). As an illustration, explicit knowledge of modal markers, their function, and interpretation in authentic contexts can assist learners to make an optimal use of speech acts where face work plays a crucial function. Notably, explicit instruction of pragmatic conventions can equip the mind to make a better use of cognitive mechanisms by fortifying learners’ background assumptions for coping with the interpretation of future events (Baars, 1988, cited in Schmidt, 1990:138). Not surprisingly, the issue of explicit versus implicit instruction has been an interesting object of inquiry in all domains of EFL teaching. That is why Stern (1992:327) states that one of the main key issues in second language pedagogy is “whether the learner should be taught to approach the learning task consciously as an intellectual exercise, or whether he should be encouraged to avoid thinking about the language and absorb it intuitively”.

Additionally, explicit instruction may eventually lead to more learner automaticity and fluency. Current studies show that automaticity and fluency is the by-product of continued practice and successive exposure to the targeted tasks (Samuels, 2006). Differently stated, students should be given multiple opportunities to practice the assigned activities

and tasks until they become automatic (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003; Rasinski, 2006). Naturally, this requires some type of explicit instruction or consciousness raising (Sharwood Smith, 1981) or form-focus instruction which can help the learners to notice the involved cues and to scaffold them (Schmidt, 2001).

Recent developments in the area of cross-cultural communication have equally heightened the need for investigating the issues which may most probably lead to communication breakdown. One of these issues which have extensively been investigated concerns face-threatening speech acts such as apologies (BlumKulka & Olshtain, 1984; Cohen & Olshtain, 1985). The findings presented by these studies reveal that L2 learners are often prone to offending their interlocutors when performing face-threatening acts. The main culprit responsible for creating such embarrassing episodes is related to the differences concerning the idiosyncratic nature of the social rules used in the speaking process.

As such, the necessity of explicit instruction focusing on the development of L2 pragmatics has grown in importance in light of recent findings reported by the related studies such as those reported by Martinez- Flor et al, (2003) and Kasper & Rose (2002). It has been demonstrated that L2 learners which receive instruction on pragmatics features show a better handling of face threatening situations (Takahashi, 2001; Rose and Ng Kwai-Fun, 2001, Safont, 2005). The reason is that literacy on proper handling of politeness strategies provides worthwhile cognitive support for basic interpersonal communication skills which L2 learners need to use in order to communicate with others successfully. In other words, teaching of L2 pragmatics is of a great value which is often ignored in traditional language classrooms.

Eslami-rasekh and Mardani, 2010 report that EFL learners' L2 pragmatic needs go unnoticed in the Iranian foreign language contexts. As a result, it can be stated that an insufficiently developed L2 pragmatic interlanguage should be thoughtfully addressed to help learners to avoid pragmatic failure. Apparently, this requires carefully planned pragmatic activities which can help learners to internalize the appropriate input or metapragmatic information which is only possible through explicit instruction of pragmatic rules (Takimoto, 2009; Yaqubi, 2012).

The results reported by the studies addressing explicit instruction of L2 pragmatic features have invariably reflected that developing learners' awareness of pragmatic rules can have a significantly determinant role in improving the learners' skills in performing communicative tasks. It is interesting to note that most studies also point to the interaction between learners' level of English proficiency and their age in using their pragmatic competence to cope with various communicative episodes involving politeness speech acts (Ghobadi & Fahim, 2009). Evidently, the explicit instruction of L2 pragmatic routines seems to improve and facilitate L2 learners' communicative behaviors in specific situations (Tateyama, 2001). According to House (1996), explicit instruction of L2 pragmatic routines could make the learners in the explicit group develop an awareness and understanding of the differences between L1 and L2 pragmatic preferences, and as such, eliminate negative L1 transfer through 'noticing' (Schmidts, 1993).

Most studies focusing on the key role of direct or explicit instruction to student learning have notably tried to investigate to what extent explicit or direct instruction is efficacious in learning and teaching various language components or major skills (Baumann & Duffy, 1997; Rupley, Blair & Nichols, 2009). So far, however, there has been little discussion about the utility of explicit instruction of FTA strategies and its possible influence on oral fluency of EFL learners. On this basis, the aim of the present study was to examine whether explicit and direct instruction of FTA strategies can lead to the development of EFL learners' oral fluency in lifelike communicative encounters.

## II. METHODOLOGY

### Participants

From the population of undergraduate translation students studying English translation at Isfahan (Khorasgan) Islamic Azad University, a sample of 100 Intermediate and advanced students, 50 each, were selected based on their scores on an OPT test. They were further divided into four equal groups who were homogenized in terms of oral fluency based on their scores on an IELTS speaking pre-test. Subsequently, they were randomly assigned to two control and two experimental groups. In other words, only one of the intermediate and one of the advanced samples served as treatment groups, while the other two were designated as no treatment samples. The age of students, both male and female, ranged between 18 and 24. In fact, students at each proficiency level consisted of 15 females and 10 males.

### Instruments

An Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was administered to screen out the targeted population based on their proficiency levels. Obviously, the limited proficiency (LEP) student were excluded since their interlanguage could not deal with the speaking tasks utilized as pre and post-tests which were structurally two alternate forms of IELTS speaking (interview) tests. These tests served as data collecting instruments for estimating the learners' oral fluency before and after the treatment phase. The validity of the speaking tests was established based on specialist opinion, whereas their reliability indices were determined by using inter-reliability measure and was equal to 0.87. Care was taken to utilize the same scoring grid for all groups under investigation.

Only the Experimental samples were exposed to explicit instruction of face threatening strategies employing Gil's (2012) model. During the treatment, the experimental groups were taught how to manage and control face threatening acts signaled by the speakers through carefully designed role play activities, and shortly after, by enlisting video play back interpretation and stimulated recall techniques used for further scaffolding of learning. The no- treatment groups, however, received no direct instruction on face threatening strategies and were taught by using conventional techniques.

### Procedures

Whereas the Speaking Conventional Class (SCC) students were taught speaking with adopting a normal methodology, the Speaking Class with FTA Instruction (SCFI) was explicitly taught with instruction on face threatening acts. As shown in table 1, For the FTA group, “Face-Threatening Speech Acts and Face-Invasive Speech Acts: An Interpretation of Politeness Phenomena” written by “(Gil, 2012)”, was used as the basis of the treatment in this study.

TABLE 1.  
TYPES OF THREAT ACCORDING TO DIFFERENT SPEECH ACTS

Type of Speech/ Act utterance	Type of Threat		Hearer's Face	
	Speaker's Face		Positive	Negative
Assertive	S's commitment to the truth of a proposition is exposed to H's valuation.	S imposes himself an obligation: S has to be consequent with his/her own words.	S has chosen a subject and has presented it in some particular way. Subject and mood may not be valuable for H.	S imposes H a subject.
Directive	S admits that he/she wants, prefers or even needs H to do something.	S imposes himself an obligation: S will have to be consequent with his/her own words, i.e., with his want, preference or even need.	S makes an assumption about H's capacities or even social condition.	<i>S imposes H to do something.</i>
Commissive	S admits that he/ she wants to do something in order to benefit H. S makes manifest an assumption about his/her capacities and even social position.	<i>S imposes himself to do something in the benefit of H.</i>	S makes manifest an assumption about H's wishes or preferences. E.g., S believes that H wants S to accomplish the promise.	<i>S imposes himself a future action that will certainly affect H.</i>
Expressive	<i>S's feelings or emotions are exposed to H's valuation.</i>	H imposes himself/ herself an obligation; S will have to be consequent with the feelings or emotions he expressed.	S makes an assumption about S's wants, preferences or even needs.	<i>S imposes H his/ her own valuation; i.e., H is expected to be thankful or charitable with S</i>
Declarative	S, an authorized individual, exposes something that must be institutionally legitimate.	<i>S imposes himself to give support to the new state of affairs that was generated, at least in part, by the declaration.</i>	Involving conditions and rules, it is an strong assumption about S's possibilities and social position.	<i>H is part of the institutional framework where the declaration is performed, and he/ she must accept it.</i>

\* Intrinsic threats are types in *italics*.

As can be seen in Table 1, different types of threats to both the speaker and listener are enumerated and briefly described for various speech acts.

The treatment sessions targeting explicit instruction of face threatening acts was carefully planned and implemented in a linear fashion. First, the significance of politeness speech acts and their functional utility in saving face was explained through a number of communicative situations based on the employed framework. In this *preliminary stage*, the participants in the experimental groups became aware of the impact of face threatening acts and how best they could be warded off during real life interactions.

Then in the *prediction stage*, the first line of a previously prepared dialogue between two native English speakers concerning a genuine communicative event which contained typical instances of politeness and face threatening acts was played. Subsequently, the teacher asked learners to predict what the topic of conversation was going to be about, who the speaker was and what s/he wanted. Here, clarification of likely ambiguities and misunderstandings was pedagogically necessary. Finally, the tape of the dialogue was played right through and the students were asked to check whether their predictions were correct or not.

Afterwards, in the *reconstruction phase*, the participants were divided into pairs and each pair was given a cut up dialogue worksheet and was instructed to put the dialogue back together again. In this reconstruction phase, the teacher acted as a facilitator suggesting ways in which learners might finish the task appropriately. At the end, the whole dialogue was played as a source of feedback to help students check their answers.

Finally, the teacher moved into the *practice stage* and by using video playback of the dialogue asked learners to identify linguistic markers signaling politeness, face saving and/or face threatening strategies. This phase was complemented by role play which was actually a verbal discourse completion task (DCT). In this stage, the participants were divided in pairs and they were asked to act out the roles of two speakers portrayed in particular communicative situations on another worksheet. The main objective of this phase was to examine how explicit instruction of face threatening acts could be effective in developing learners' oral fluency performing life like interactions.

After the treatment, a full semester, the oral fluency for all samples in intermediate and advanced control and experimental groups was evaluated by using the same speaking post-test in the form of an interview. The results obtained from the post-test were analyzed by related statistical tools.

### III. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The data obtained on the post test for both treatment and non-treatment groups were analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques from SPSS.

This section presents the results obtained from the analysis of the obtained data.

### Results Related to OPT

To ensure the homogeneity of the participants' levels of language proficiency in control and experimental samples, an Independent Samples t-Test was run on the OPT results to explore whether the difference between the mean scores of the participants in each proficiency level was statistically significant or not. Tables 2 and 3 present the results of the analysis.

TABLE 2.  
RESULTS OF INDEPENDENT SAMPLES T-TEST ON OPT SCORES FOR INTERMEDIATE GROUPS

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
OPT scores of Intermediate learners	Equal variances assumed	.72	.40	.70	48	.49	.44	.63	-.82	1.70
	Equal variances not assumed			.70	47.62	.49	.44	.63	-.82	1.70

According to table 2, the p value (0.49) was considerably greater than the specified level of significance (.05). Consequently, it was concluded that there was not a statistically significant difference between the intermediate groups.

TABLE 3.  
RESULTS OF INDEPENDENT SAMPLES T-TEST ON OPT SCORES FOR ADVANCED GROUPS

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
OPT scores of Advanced learners	Equal variances assumed	.10	.75	.21	48	.83	.16	.75	-1.34	1.66
	Equal variances not assumed			.21	47.89	.83	.16	.75	-1.34	1.66

According to table 3, there was not a statistically significant difference between the advanced groups involved in the study. The reason was that the p value (.83) was considerably greater than the specified significance level of the study (.05). Therefore, the equality of the group means was confirmed.

The results of these tables revealed that the participants in the experimental and control groups were equal with regard to their levels of language proficiency.

### Results Related to Oral Fluency

Table 4 displays the descriptive statistics of pretest and posttest oral fluency scores in both experimental and control intermediate groups.

TABLE 4.  
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF ORAL FLUENCY SCORES IN INTERMEDIATE GROUPS

Level	Group	Variable	N	Range	Mean	Std. Error Mean	Std. Deviation
Intermediate	Experimental	Pretest	25	10	11.28	.537	2.685
		Posttest	25	10	16.16	.596	2.982
	Control	Pretest	25	7	10.80	.346	1.732
		Posttest	25	7	11.04	.303	1.513

As can be observed in Table 4, the pretest mean score in the experimental group (11.28) and the pretest mean score in the control group (10.80) were nearly close to each other, whereas the posttest mean score in the Experimental group (16.16) was more than that of control group (11.04). Likewise, the results of the pretest and posttest within the control group were somehow similar, but the corresponding results within the Experimental group were dissimilar. This clearly shows that explicit instruction of face threatening strategies has affected the oral fluency of intermediate learners in the experimental group.

In order to ascertain whether explicit instruction of face threatening strategies has any significant impact on oral fluency (OF) of EFL learners, a Paired Sample t-Test was conducted to compare the means of the two sub-test results within the experimental and control groups. Table 5 below clearly illustrates the significance of the resulting difference.

TABLE 5.  
 PAIRED SAMPLES T-TEST FOR THE INTERMEDIATE GROUPS

		Paired Differences		Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation		Lower	Upper			
Pair 1: Experimental	OF Pre-test scores - OF Post-test scores	-4.88	2.05	.41	-5.73	-4.04	-11.92	24	.00
Pair 2: Control	OF Pre-test scores - OF Post-test scores	-.24	1.01	.20	-.66	.18	-1.19	24	.25

Table 5 displays the mean and standard error values for the experimental and the control groups. The mean column, in the Paired-Samples t-Test table, shows the average difference between the pretest and posttest. By looking at the column for means, one can easily infer that across all twenty five subjects in the experimental group, level of achievement highly increased (on average, 4.88 points) after receiving the treatment. The significance (2-tailed) column demonstrates the probability of obtaining a t statistic whose value is equal to or greater than that of the obtained t statistic. Since the p value for pair 1 (i.e. the experimental group's pretest and posttest) in the table (.00) is much less than the specified level of significance (.05), it was concluded that there is a significant difference between the participants in terms of oral fluency, before implementing the treatment and after that.

Accordingly, we can conclude that the observed improvement in oral fluency of the participants in the group is not due to chance variation at all and the change can be safely attributed to the treatment. As for pair 2 (i.e. the control group's pre-test and post-test), the p value (0.25) is greater than the specified level of significance (.05); therefore, the conclusion would be that there is no significant difference between the achievement of control group's participants, who received no explicit instruction on face threatening strategies at the beginning and end of the course.

Table 6 displays the descriptive statistics of pretest and posttest oral fluency scores in both advanced experimental and control groups.

TABLE 6.  
 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF ORAL FLUENCY SCORES IN ADVANCED GROUPS

Level	Group	Variable	N	Range	Mean	Std. Error Mean	Std. Deviation
Advanced	Experimental	Pretest	25	10	19.60	.503	2.517
		Posttest	25	10	21.40	.462	2.309
	Control	Pretest	25	9	17.80	.510	2.550
		Posttest	25	8	18.04	.442	2.208

As Table 6 demonstrates, the posttest oral fluency mean score in the advanced participants in the experimental group (21.40) is larger than that of their pretest mean score in (19.60). Moreover, the posttest oral fluency mean score in the control group (18.04) was somehow similar to the pretest mean score of the group (17.80). This means that advanced learners in the experimental group showed an improvement from the pretest to posttest; however, the learners' performance in the control group was almost the same before and after the treatment.

Again, a Paired-Samples t-Test at 0.05 level of significance was used to compare the results on the pre-test and post-test concerning the oral fluency of the learners in the experimental and control groups. The data consisted of two measures taken by the same subjects, one before and one after the course of instruction. The results of the test are shown in the Table 7 below.

TABLE 7.  
 PAIRED SAMPLES T-TEST FOR THE ADVANCED GROUPS

		Paired Differences		Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		T	df	Sig. (2- tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation		Lower	Upper			
Pair 1: Experimental	OF Pre-test scores - OF Post-test scores	-1.80	1.29	.26	-2.33	-1.27	-6.98	24	.00
Pair 2: Control	OF Pre-test scores - OF Post-test scores	-.24	.72	.15	-.54	.06	-1.66	24	.11

By looking at the column for means in the above table, one can easily infer that across all twenty five subjects in the experimental group, level of achievement increased (1.8 points on average) after receiving the treatment. Since the p value for pair 1 (i.e. experimental group's pretest and posttest) in the table (.00) is much less than the specified level of significance (i.e. .05), it is concluded that there is a significant difference between the participants in terms of their oral fluency before implementing the treatment and after that. In regard to the pair 2 (i.e. control group's pretest and posttest); the p value (.11) is greater than the specified level of significance (.05). Accordingly, the conclusion would be

that there is no significant difference between the participants in term of oral fluency within the control group who did not receive any explicit instruction on face threatening strategies.

To compare the results of oral fluency tests for the intermediate and advanced levels, the difference between the participants' performance on the pretest and posttest was calculated. The descriptive statistics are depicted in Table 8 below.

TABLE 8.  
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF DIFFERENCES IN ALL GROUPS OF THE STUDY

Level	Group	N	Mean	Std. Error Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Intermediate	Experimental	25	4.88	.410	2.048	-.837	.360
	Control	25	.16	.170	.850	-.768	.063
Advanced	Experimental	25	1.80	.258	1.291	.152	1.000
	Control	25	.72	.147	.737	-.848	.994

of all data sets was rather symmetrical around the mean and Kurtosis values were below 1.0, indicating that the distributions tend to be mesokurtic (i.e., normal). The greatest and the lowest mean scores of the differences between posttest and pretest were 4.88 and 1.80 in intermediate experimental and advanced experimental groups respectively. The mean scores of the differences between posttest and pretest in control groups for both intermediate and advanced levels were found to be negligible. In other words, in both language proficiency levels, the oral fluency scores of the participants in experimental groups improved after receiving explicit instruction on face threatening strategies. Meanwhile, the amount of improvement of oral fluency for the intermediate experimental group (4.88, on average) was higher than that of the advanced experimental group (1.80 points, on average).

In order to investigate whether the difference between the mean scores of the oral fluency improvement in advanced and intermediate experimental groups is statistically significant or not, an Independent Samples t-Test was actually conducted at (0.05) level of significance. They are presented in Table 9 below results.

TABLE 9.  
INDEPENDENT SAMPLES T-TEST FOR ADVANCED AND INTERMEDIATE EXPERIMENTAL GROUPS

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
	Equal variances assumed	4.74	.03	6.36	48	.00	3.08	.48	2.11
Equal variances not assumed			6.36	40.48	.00	3.08	.48	2.10	4.06

The results revealed that the two groups were found significantly different from one another. The reason was that the p value of the test (0.00) was much less than the specified level of significance (0.05); consequently, the assumption of equality of the differences between means was rejected and there was a significant difference in the amount of oral fluency improvement in both intermediate and advanced experimental groups.

#### IV. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Notably, the main objective of the study was to investigate whether explicit instruction of FTA strategies improves oral fluency of EFL students with different proficiency levels or not. A carefully designed pretest, posttest control group design was used and the outcome-that is, oral fluency of the learners was observed by manipulating the independent variable (i.e., explicit instruction of FTA strategies).

First in order to determine the students' language proficiency and also the homogeneity of both groups an independent language t-test was taken from them and language proficiency of intermediate with the p value being (0.49) and advanced with the p value of (0.83), also proved the homogeneity of both classes. Before giving the treatment to the experimental students and the control group which was taught in the conventional way, a pre-test was taken from them to evaluate their oral fluency. The pre-test mean score of intermediate group being (11.28) and the advanced being (10.80) was nearly close to each other. After the treatment to the experimental groups and the control groups were taught in the conventional way the same pre-test was taken from them in which the order of the questions was changed and was taken after a month. The results of the posttest for the control group being (11.04) and the experimental group being (16.16) showed the effect of the explicit teaching of FTA. The results showed that level of achievement increased by 4.88 points for the experimental group after receiving the treatment.

As it was mentioned by Villaume and Brabham (2003) active communication and interaction between teacher and student is a crucial element. The dynamic and interactive relationship fosters flexible and responsive instruction which was used accordingly in light of the research as the method of teaching. Also as Blair (2007) mentioned, strategy learning is a necessity for control and direction by the teacher and can be obtained by using explicit instruction. As it

has been mentioned explicit instruction in our research lead to more learner fluency in oral production. Giving continued practice and successive exposure to the targeted tasks (Samuels, 2006) in the study lead to automaticity and fluency in the results. By giving explicit FTA instruction to the students we gave them the opportunity to practice them to become automatic (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003; Rasinski, 2006). The explicit instruction given to the students lead to consciousness raising in using FTA knowledge (Sharwood Smith, 1981).

A reason for communication breakdown has been investigated and mentioned by (BlumKulka & Olshtain, 1984; Cohen & Olshtain, 1985) which is in light with the 4.88 point increase in oral fluency by student who were taught FTA explicitly. It is stated that L2 speakers lack of pragmatic competence results in pragmatic failure which Leech (1983) say that it is in the failure of transfer of norms of a language to another which leads to communication breakdown and hesitation in speaking which by teaching them was overcome. The chance of offending someone depends on face-threatening acts, so by knowing them you can overcome the offensive usage and be more fluent.

The necessity of explicit instruction on L2 pragmatics has become more important in recent years by the results of studies (Martinez- Flor et al, 2003; Kasper & Rose, 2002) which this study approves and is in the same line. Studies showed that L2 learners who were given FTA instruction on pragmatics features were more capable of handling face threatening situations (Takahashi, 2001; Rose and Ng Kwai-Fun, 2001, Safont, 2005) which in the case of our experimental group this was proven by the increase in fluency. As Eslami-rasekh and Mardani, 2010 report that EFL learners' L2 pragmatic needs go unnoticed in the Iranian foreign language contexts. The result of that was an insufficiently developed L2 pragmatic interlanguage which as the result of FTA explicit instruction can be overcome to help avoid pragmatic failure.

Teaching explicit FTA can be part of the pragmatic activities that can help learners internalize the needed input information also mentioned by (Takimoto, 2009; Yaqubi, 2012). Results of their studies proved that explicit instruction of L2 pragmatic features reflected that developing learners' knowledge of pragmatic rules can affect learners' skills in performing communicative needs. The results of our study also supported this idea and the increase in oral fluency by FTA knowledge was a proof to the idea. Studies point to the relation between learners' level of English proficiency in using pragmatic competence in communication using politeness speech acts (Ghobadi & Fahim, 2009) had been of concern in the past, which now it proves that lack of knowledge of FTA can effect communication and slow the procedure down. As was proven explicit L2 instruction improved L2 learners' communication too which was pointed by (Tateyama, 2001).

As for most studies which were concerned with the efficacious of explicit instruction in learning and teaching of different language components or major skills (Baumann & Duffy, 1997; Rupley, Blair & Nichols, 2009), which till now not a lot of research was done on explicit instruction of face threatening acts. By this research it is proved that explicit teaching in language components like FTA can improve a language skill which in this case is their oral fluency.

Globalization and the existence variety of communities with different cultures signify that, politeness is realized differently. As it has been indicated by researchers, politeness in different cultures can cause miscommunication. Lack of knowledge in this phenomenon can lead to violation of politeness which will cause failure in communication and fluency. Knowing FTA's will lead to being realized as the same social level, involvement in communication, not losing face and oral fluency. This can be overcome by developing interaction skills and social devices which are FTA's taught to reach fluency goals in this research.

Teaching FTA acts explicitly in light of the researches is to increase awareness and consciousness so that they are easier to perform and increase fluency. As it has also been indicated by research, explicit instruction involves conscious operation and efficacious in terms of fluency. Direct explicit communication and active supervised practices is associated with automaticity and fluency. Teaching explicitly is more effective for struggling students in which this research also proves that explicit FTA had more effect on the intermediate level in comparison to the advance.

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