

Knowledge of L2 Speech Acts: Impact of Gender and Language Learning Experience

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Abstract

The number of studies focusing on the role of gender and language learning experience in interlanguage pragmatic development is limited in ESL contexts. Iranian EFL context is not an exception and few investigations have been conducted in this regard. Therefore, the current investigation attempted to study the impact of gender and English language learning experience (LLE) on speech-act interlanguage pragmatic (ILP) performance of Iranian EFL learners. Gender was treated as a biological factor and language learning experience was operationalized as the number of years spent learning English and the participants were divided into three groups of 1 to 2 years, 3 to five years, and plus 6 years. A multiple-choice discourse completion test (MDCT) including five common English speech acts (request, apology, refusal, complaint, and compliment/compliment responses) was developed and validated by the use of native speakers. A 35-item MDCT was achieved after two pilot studies by native and nonnative speakers. This ILP test was administered to 500 Iranian EFL learners to obtain the required data. The results obtained from an independent t-test revealed that there was no significant difference between female vs. male participants' speech-act performances. However, a one-way ANOVA showed that there were significant differences among the ILP performances of the three groups with different LLEs. Then, applying a Tukey test indicated that learners that had spent more years on language learning, had higher speech act ILP scores. The findings of this study indicated that students with more LLE can absorb speech acts better.

Keywords: interlanguage pragmatic competence, language learning experience, gender, MDCT, speech act

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1. Introduction

Interlanguage pragmatics is a fledgling domain of SLA research which has attracted enthusiastic investigation during the past two decades. Although different aspects of interlanguage pragmatic competence have been studied, the depth of this research body is shallow and it does not answer our multitude of questions with adequate scientific certainty (Kasper & Rose, 2014; Taguchi, 2011, 2012). The role of gender in interlanguage pragmatic development and performance is one of these under-researched areas. The previously accumulated research literature in this regard suffers from some obvious shortcomings. First, compared with other domains of SLA research, the number of the studies in ILP is limited. Second, these studies are narrow in their scope both in the number of subjects and in the quantity and magnitude of ILP knowledge which has been checked for finding gender-based differences. Third, the findings of these studies are diverse and in some cases even opposing. Some studies report a better ILP performance by female L2 learners (Rintell, 1984; Tannen, 1991; Vellenga, 2008), while others argue for male L2 learners' superiority in ILP performance (Geluykens & Kraft, 2002, 2007; Herbert, 1990; Parisi & Wogan, 2006).

The previous gender-based ILP studies involved one to three speech acts. Accordingly, the present investigation has attempted to conduct a more robust study with more participants and more speech acts to examine the role of gender as a biological factor in the ILP performance. Therefore, the impact of gender on the ILP performance of 500 Iranian EFL learners regarding their knowledge about five common English speech acts including requests, apologies, refusals, complaints, and compliments/ compliment responses has been scrutinized in the current investigation. This study has also examined the impact of English LLE on L2 learner' ILP knowledge. Language learning experience is, in essence, the past portfolio of a learner's engagement with L2 and his/ her learning path which has led to the development of communicative competence encompassing many components one of which is pragmatic competence.

2. Literature Review

2.1. *Interlanguage Pragmatic (ILP) Competence*

As the name "interlanguage pragmatic competence" implies, it includes two important theories: "interlanguage" and "pragmatics". Put it in better words, the interlanguage pragmatic (ILP) competence has been developed from the findings and speculations derived from the two mentioned underlying theories. Based on the chronology of their inception, these two theories and the process of their coinage to shape the

construct of ILP competence will be briefly touched upon and discussed here.

Pragmatics and the concept of pragmatic competence has its established trail and root in linguistics and has been the focus of many theoretical speculations and empirical investigations from Hymes' (1972) reaction to Chomsky's theory about the abstract knowledge of grammar as the core of any human language and the competence-performance dichotomy. Pragmatics is considered a branch of linguistics which deals with the language use in the real world situations. Many definitions have been given for pragmatics but one of the first and most comprehensive definitions was proposed by Crystal. Pragmatics is "the study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication" (Crystal, 1997, p. 301).

According to Mey (2001), pragmatics is a paradigm shift from theoretical grammar in general and syntax in particular to the language user. Put it another way, pragmatics can be defined as the study of communicative actions in their sociocultural context. According to Kasper and Rose (2002), these communicative actions involve both the use of speech acts (such as apologizing, complaining, complimenting, and requesting) and active engagement in different types of discourse and participation in speech events of varying length and complexity. Leech (1983) has defined pragmatics as the study of how utterances have meanings in real-world situations. Kasper and Blum-Kulka (1993) hold that pragmatics is the study of people's comprehension and production of different linguistic actions in social contexts.

Yet, pragmatics can be thought of as a field of study which investigates the ways in which context contributes to meaning. Pragmatics encompasses speech act theory, conversational implicatures, talk-in-interaction and other approaches to language behavior in philosophy, sociology, and linguistics (Jucker & Taavitsainen, 2008). It studies how the transmission of meaning depends on not only the linguistic knowledge (e.g. grammar, lexicon) of the speaker and listener, but also the context of the utterance, knowledge about the status of those involved, the inferred intent of the speaker, and so on. In this respect, pragmatics explains how language users are able to overcome apparent ambiguity, since meaning relies on the manner, place, and time of an utterance (Bardovi-Harlig, 2012; Cummings, 2005).

According to Barron (2005), pragmatic competence focuses on the functional and contextualized use of language, and since its emergence it has been considered as a crucial part of communicative

competence. Ellis (2008) asserts that pragmatic competence consists of the knowledge that speaker-hearers use in order to engage in communication, including how speech acts are successfully performed. Many researchers and linguists hold that speech acts are the core or make-up of the pragmatic competence (e.g. Crystal, 1997; Ellis, 2008; Kaper & Rose, 2002; Mey, 2001).

The second cornerstone in the definition of ILP competence is the “interlanguage” theory/construct. Interlanguage is a concept in SLA research used by Larry Selinker (1972), which refers to an ESL or EFL learner’s knowledge of the target language in each of the developmental stages in the whole learning process which has features from the two language systems and is not fully similar to the first or second language of L2 learner. According to Crystal (1997), “[interlanguage] reflects the learner’s evolving system of rules, and results from a variety of processes, including the influence of the first language (‘transfer’), contrastive interference from the target language, and the overgeneralization of newly encountered rules” (p. 305). Some researchers (Corder, 1967, 1971; Nemser, 1971; Selinker, 1972) hold that interlanguage is metaphorically a halfway position between the first language (L1) and the target language (TL), hence the word “inter” to represent this concept.

An interlanguage is a dynamic, regular, and unstable linguistic system which has been developed by a learner of a second or foreign language (L2) who still has not become completely proficient and fluent in L2 but is approximating it. Having been developed like an embryo in its stepwise maturation, the interlanguage system preserves some features of L1 and/ or overgeneralizes L2 rules in speaking or writing the target language. Such an interlanguage system lets the learner produce errors and idiosyncratic performances which neither resemble L1 structure nor follow L2 regulations (Ellis, 2008; Keshavarz, 2012).

An interlanguage is idiosyncratically based on a learner’s experiences with L2 and his or her available L1 structures, words and discursal patterns. It can fossilize, or cease developing in any of its developmental stages (Keshavarz, 2012). The interlanguage rules are claimed to be shaped by several factors, including L1 transfer, transfer of training, strategies of L2 learning (e.g. simplification), strategies of L2 communication (or communication strategies like circumlocution), and overgeneralization of the target language patterns (Keshavarz, 2006). The concept of “interlanguage” has attracted a great deal of theory and research since its inception and has become a theory propelling SLA research domain for more than half a century (Bardovi-Hrlig, 2012; Barron, 2005; Ellis, 2008, Kaper & Rose, 2002).

In his seminal work, Kasper (1998) combined the two previously discussed areas of study, i.e., pragmatics in linguistics and interlanguage theory from SLA research, and used the term interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) for the first time. Kasper viewed ILP as “the study of nonnative speaker’s comprehension, production, and acquisition of linguistic actions in L2, or....‘how to do things with words’ (Austin [1962]) in a second language” (p.184). Interlanguage pragmatic knowledge can be thought of as the nonnative speaker’s knowledge of a pragmatic system and knowledge of its appropriate use (Kasper, 1998; Rose, 1997).

Kasper and Blum-Kulka (1993) proposed two definitions for ILP. In the narrow sense, they defined ILP as “the study of nonnative speaker’s use and acquisition of linguistic action patterns in a second language” (p. 3). In the broader definition of ILP, they asserted that interlanguage pragmatics is “the study of intercultural styles brought about through language contact, the conditions for their emergence and change, the relationship to their substrata, and their communicative effectiveness” (p. 4). Kasper and Rose (2002) provided a tangible illustration about ILP as having an interdisciplinary or hybrid nature derived from pragmatics and SLA together:

As the study of second language use, interlanguage pragmatics examines how nonnative speakers comprehend and produce action in a target language. As the study of second language learning, interlanguage pragmatics investigates how L2 learners develop the ability to understand and perform action in a target language (p.5).

The term interlanguage pragmatics implies a very fundamental characteristic about the nature of construct validity and psychological existence of the construct it represents. It means that pragmatic knowledge develops like an interlanguage and in its initial stages is completely dependent on the L1 pragmatic competence and the main factor influencing this fledgling approximate pragmatic competence is transfer from the L1 (Kasper & Rose, 2002). Furthermore, L2 learners’ interlanguage pragmatic knowledge gradually expands in quality and quantity and detaches further and further from L1 pragmatic competence and moves towards the L2 pragmatic competence. This slow but continuing progress is systematic and variable and goes through manifold developmental stages during which L2 learners produce speech acts which are idiosyncratic with regard to the regular pragmalinguistic forms or sociopragmatic norms of either L1 or L2.

Interlanguage pragmatic competence utilizes pragmatic theories, principles and frameworks such as speech act theory, politeness theory, conversational implicatures, etc., to explain how L2 learners encode and decode their intended meanings in L2 interactions (Schauer, 2009).

Interlanguage pragmatic competence includes appropriate production of speech acts and their appropriate comprehension in the course of authentic conversations in real world situations (Kasper & Rose, 2002; Schauer, 2009; Taguchi, 2003, 2005, 2008). Such competence for effective ILP production and comprehension reflects the substantial role of sociocultural knowledge for different second or foreign language interactions (Schauer, 2009).

2.2. Gender and ILP Development

According to Wardhaugh (2002), the fact that there are differences between L2 males and females in learning and using a second or foreign language is undeniable. Male and female speakers use even their L1 differently. For example, men speak and swear more than women (Wardhaugh, 2002), whereas women speak more politely and indirectly (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989), etc. These differences may result from biological, mental and social differences between the two groups. Various justifications and reasons have been given for gender differences. The “strategy model” proposed by Oxford and Nyikos (1989), for example, explains that because of the unequal division of labor and power in society, men and women use speech acts differently in order to influence people and events as they want.

As far as gender as a biological variable is concerned, there are few studies about L1 and L2 pragmatic tendencies and, therefore, little is known in this regard (Kasper & Schmidt, 1996). Holmes’ (1993) research indicated that although there is no absolute consensus, in L1 research, it is generally accepted that women are more polite than men in their use of language. Based on Tannen (1991, cited in Kasper and Schmidt, 1996), female language learners prefer more personal concern and emotional content compared with male learners. Geluykens and Kraft (2007) studied gender-related variation in native and nonnative interlanguage complaints. They arrived at two conclusions: first, male L2 speakers showed a higher tendency to employ slightly more confrontational complaint strategies than female learners. Second, addressee’s gender has a significant impact on L2 compliment formulation and how to perform it.

Some investigations addressed the role of gender as a factor in L2 learners’ interlanguage pragmatic development. Kerekes (1996, cited in Kasper & Rose, 2002) found that female learners showed a much closer approximation towards the L2 norm than did male learners in their perception of sympathy and support. Rintell (1984) conducted a study about ESL learners’ perception of emotion in speech. The results showed that females’ performance was slightly better than that of males’ but not statistically significant in the use of speech acts. Rintell (1984),

accordingly, concluded that non-linguistic variables were of less influence than predicted in the production of speech acts. Tannen (1991) attempted to make categorical observations about the different speech styles in the use of L1 speech acts by men and women. She supported the noticeable differences in the positive and negative politeness considerations in favor of female speakers.

Jung (2002) supported the idea that L2 female learners showed more tendency for following the sociopragmatic norms of the target L2 compared with males. Parisi and Wogan (2006) studied L2 compliment topics and gender differences and found that more compliments occurred from male to females (61%) than from females to males (30%).

Another substantial aspect in the role of gender in ILP development is the various distinctions attributed to being feminine or masculine in different languages and their related cultures (Siegal, 1994, 1995). Siegal (1995) noted that such distinctions will influence the quantity and role of interlanguage pragmatic use and development and deserve a great deal of research. According to Kasper and Rose (2002), the reasons that women and men use and learn pragmatic features differently are not many because of their natural characteristics, but because they engage in different social activities; however, besides gender, individuals' social status and race, ethnic background, and sociocultural tendencies are also potential factors that may influence their choices on what kinds of activities to take part in.

In spite of the previously done studies on L2 interlanguage pragmatic development, we are still lagging behind the construct validity of the role of gender even as a biological factor in shaping the second language ILP knowledge in general and in the acquisition of L2 speech acts in particular. In addition, no comprehensive study has ever been done on this issue in Iranian EFL context. Therefore, this study was launched to address this issue further.

2.3. Language Learning Experience and ILP Development

Learning experience is a very fundamental factor in L2 learning which is manifested in the quantity and quality of time spent learning a language both in native and nonnative contexts. Language learning experience (LLE) for interlanguage pragmatic development is materialized in the form of explicit vs. implicit instruction, exposure to L2, the richness of input, L2 interaction and output, length of residence in the L2 community, L2 classroom practices, society's ideology and attitude towards the foreign language and language learners' intrinsic vs. extrinsic or instrumental vs. integrative motivation to master an L2 (Kasper & Rose, 2002; Taguchi, 2008).

Using the internet, chatting with NS and fluent NNSs of English in chat rooms, interacting through social networks such as face-book and twitter, sending and receiving emails in English, watching satellite channels and listening to radio channels broadcasting in English, watching movies and listening to English music, reading English newspapers, magazines, and journals are other resources which can contribute to the LLE in EFL and ESL contexts (Elder & Davies, 2006; Sharifian, 2009). The quality and quantity of these sources of LLE largely depend on the educational policy and national curriculum of any country (McKay, 2005). In fact, ideological considerations imposed by the Iranian political system, the educational philosophy and nation's empathy/attitude towards an L2 can directly impact the richness of these channels of LLE and can influence the L2 learners' motivation to learn a special foreign language. For example, in many countries throughout the world English is taught as the main L2 necessary for getting a diploma or a university degree (Sharifian, 2009). This means that many L2 learners start learning English in secondary or even in elementary schools. English for example in Iran is taught from the first grade of junior high school to the Ph.D. level in any academic major. The quality and quantity of such formal LLE can hardly lead to the development of communicative competence in general and ILP competence in particular.

Another context of LLE is language institutes which are expanding quickly in EFL contexts. Iranian EFL context for example has seen a mushroom growth of language institutes in the last two decades. These language institutes provide better LLEs for L2 learners. They present English through current universal conversation books, audiovisual components, and better pronunciation. They provide a manageable classroom with an acceptable number of motivated learners to interact with each other to learn English better.

Overseas LLE has also been widely studied in SLA (Barron, 2003; Cohen & Shively, 2007; Iwasaki, 2008, 2011; Kasper & Rose, 2002; Kinginger, 2010; Masumura, 2007; Pinyo, 2010; Ren, 2011; Schauer, 2007, 2008). Generally speaking, these studies have revealed that it is not just the length of residence in L2 community that leads to ILP development but rather intensity of interaction is the main factor which provides learners with rich LLE.

Both the quantity and the quality of LLE in L2 classes at high schools, language institutes, universities and residence in the target language community are very significant for the development of ILP knowledge and the acquisition of speech acts. Despite this substantial significance, the number of studies examining the impact of LLE on the

speech act ILP development specifically in Iranian EFL context is limited.

Therefore, the present study sought to investigate the impact of LLE and gender on Iranian EFL learners' ILP development regarding common English speech acts. Specifically, the current study intended to answer the following questions:

1) Does gender have any significant impact on the speech act knowledge of EFL learners?

2) Does language learning experience (LLE) have any significant impact on the speech act knowledge of EFL learners?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

A sample of 500 Iranian EFL learners participated in the present investigation. The participants' L1 was mostly Persian. Some of them had learned Persian as their second language after mother tongues such as Turkish, Kurdish, and some Iranian dialects such as Gilaki, Lori, and Tati. These participants were selected from different language institutes in different cities and towns across Tehran, Alborz, Kermanshah, Hamedan, Qazvin, and Fars provinces in 2012 and 2013. From important language institutes located in Tehran, Karaj, Shiraz, Qazvin, Hamedan, Kermanshah, Malayer, Takestan, Shahriyar, Tuyserkan, Kangavar, Asadabad, and Kazeroun, 337 female language learners and 163 male language learners were selected for the purposes of the current study. The reason for such disproportionate ratio of female and male participants somewhat represented the ratio of female learners to male learners in Iranian EFL context. In order to make sure that the participants were able to take the ILP test, the researcher considered learners' language learning profiles, examined learners' previous semester scores/ report cards and talked to the instructors, and in some cases very shortly observed some classes. The participants were from different social strata and their age range was mostly between 14 and 40 with an average age of 20.2. The participants were high school, pre-university, university, graduate and in few cases post-graduate students. Their majors and educational degrees were highly diverse. All the participants were Iranian and lived in Iran during data gathering period.

3.2. Instruments

The present research used a multiple-choice discourse completion task (MDCT) as an ILP test to gather the required data. An Interlanguage Pragmatic test (ILP Test) originally developed in this study was used for data collection. The test was validated based on the two pilot studies: one in the United States and Canada and the other in the participants' L2

context. The ILP test consisted of 35 items. Each item included a speech act situation followed by three options. The participant was required to select the most pragmatically appropriate option. One of these three options was the most appropriate considering all the pragmalinguistic/lexico-grammatical and sociopragmatic dimensions of the situational context and the given options. The given situations ranged from very informal ones to extremely formal situations. Developing an ILP test containing all speech acts was not possible considering the scope of the current study. All the speech acts would make the test lengthy for the participants to complete and might demotivate them and hence decrease their participation. Therefore, the five mostly frequent speech acts of requests, apologies, refusals, complaints, and compliments/compliment responses were selected for the ILP test of English speech acts.

The original test was made up of 50 items. All the situations and speech act choices were selected from native speakers' utterances from different conversational textbooks and other authentic resources. The third edition of *New Interchange* (Books 1, 2, 3, & 4), *American Cutting Edge* (Books 1, 2, 3, & 4), *Passages* (Books 1 & 2), *Top Notch* (Books 1, 2, 3, 4), *American English File* (Books 1, 2, 3 & 4), *Touchstone* (Books 1, 2, 3 & 4), *Spectrum* (Books 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 5 & 6), *Tactics for listening* (Books 1, 2, & 3), *Person to Person* (Books 1, 2 & 3), *How Do You Do*, *Family Album*, *International Express Way*, *Topics from A to Z* (Books 1 & 2), *American Headway* (Books 1, 2, 3 & 4), *New American Streamline* (Books 1, 2 & 3), *American Functions*, *Rosetta Stone Software for English*, and many other internet-based websites with native speaker conversations were explored meticulously to find situations in which different English speech acts were used. The workbooks of these textbooks were also examined for authentic native conversations including the required speech acts which helped in developing items for the ILP test. Each situation was part of a conversation with very little modification to adjust it for the multiple-choice pragmatic test. Item number 3 on the first draft of the ILP test was directly a request item:

Item 3.

Context: John is going to borrow his co-worker's car. He and Barbara have come to know each other just a couple of weeks ago. John needs the car for a very important job just for 3 hours:

John: Hi, Barbara. I want to ask you for a favor.

Barbara: Oh, yes... What's that?

John:

.....
Barbara: Oh, I'd love to, but..... oh...oh . Ok, no problem. How long do you need it?

John: Only for a couple of hours.

Barbara: OK, all right, sure.

John: I really appreciate your help today. Thanks a million.

- a. *Do you think you could lend me your car, of course just for a couple of hours? You know, they say a friend in need is a friend indeed!*
- b. *If you could lend me your car only for a couple of hours, I'd be very grateful. I am sure you don't need your car today, do you?*
- c. ***I hope you don't mind my asking, but I wonder if it might be at all possible for you to lend me your car for a couple of hours.***

The first version items usually had a context, a short conversation of 3 to 8 lines and three choices which represented a special speech act (item 3 was a request item with three cases of this speech act as choices). The most appropriate choice which had been uttered by one of the interactants involved in the conversation in the original conversation was used as one of the choices and its place in the course of the conversation was used as a blank to be filled by L2 test takers. Other choices were also produced by native speakers in the same conversation or following similar conversations. In some cases where the two other choices were not available, the item was sent to native speakers in the United States to produce their own answers which later were used as choices. Then, other less frequent sentences were used as the other two distractors. The developed ILP test included 10 items for each of the five speech acts. The answering mode was by filling the answer sheets or ticking the best choice both in the form of hard copy (paper-and-pencil) or soft copy (Word format or special templates on the intended websites).

The first pilot study was done based on the performance of the native speakers of American English with a high reliability index of nearly .9. Item discrimination, item facility, item reliability, and choice distribution indices demanded the exclusion of 10 items and changes in the content and format of some other items. These 10 items were deleted from the ILP test because of overlap with other items, poor structures in the stem or choices, and cultural inappropriateness based on native speakers' judgments. For many items, parts of the conversations were judged to be redundant. These conversations were shortened to keep only the necessary sections.

The second version of the validated test containing 40 items was administered to 80 EFL learners. The obtained reliability index of test was 0.75. On the basis of data analysis, five more items were removed to

have the final version with 35 items. For example, item 3 depicted above was modified after the two pilot studies:

3. John is going to borrow his co-worker’s car. He and Barbara have come to know each other just a couple of weeks ago. John needs the car for a very impotent job just for 3 hours. What would he say?
 - a. *Do you think you could lend me your car, of course just for a couple of hours? Everybody knows that a friend in need is a friend indeed!*
 - b. *Lend me your car only for a couple of hours. I am sure you don’t need your car today, do you?*
 - c. ***I hope you don’t mind my asking, but I wonder if it might be at all possible for you to lend me your car for a couple of hours.***

The final version of the ILP test consisted of 35 items. The used version included 7 request, 9 apology, 8 refusal, 7 compliment/compliment response, and 4 complaint speech acts. The used speech acts, their sequence order, and the number of items for each part of the final version are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1
ILP Test Content: Number and Sequence of Speech Acts

Speech Act	Number of Items
Request	7
Apology	9
Refusal	8
Compliment/ Compliment Response	7
Complaint	4
Total	35

3.4. Data Collection Procedure

An ILP test containing five common English speech acts (requests, apologies, refusals, compliments/compliment responses, and refusals) was developed and validated by the researcher. This ILP test was administered to 500 Iranian EFL learners. It was a paper-and-pencil test and participants were required to answer the 35 items on this test in a time limit of one hour. The participants were required to indicate their genders. They were also asked to mention their years of English Language Learning Experience (LLE) by choosing one of the three options: 1-2 years, 3-5 years or plus 6 years.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. The Impact of Gender on ILP Test Performance

To answer the first research question of the study, i.e., to explore the impact of gender on Iranian EFL learners’ interlanguage pragmatic

performance on a multiple choice test of common English speech acts, the performances were compared. The descriptive statistics for the male vs. female ILP performances are presented in Table 2. The mean scores for the ILP performance of female and male learners were 18.92 and 18.71 respectively.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Male vs. Female ILP Performance

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
ILP Score	Female	337	18.92	7.16	.39
	Male	163	18.71	6.83	.53

In order to compare the mean scores for males and females ILP scores, an independent samples t-test was applied. Table 3 shows the results of the t-test.

Results of the independent samples t-test showed that mean scores for ILP test performance did not significantly differ between females (M=18.92, SD=7.16, n=337) and males (M=18.76, SD=6.83, n=163) at the .05 level of significance ($t(498) = .309$, $p < .05$). Therefore, it was concluded that gender did not have any significant impact on the ILP performance of Iranian EFL learners.

Table 3

Independent Samples T-Test for Male vs. Female ILP Performance

		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
ILP Test Total	Equal variances assumed	.602	.438	.309	498	.758	.20802	.67365	-1.1155	1.5315
	Equal variances not assumed			.314	334.26	.754	.20802	.66279	-1.0957	1.5118

4.2. The Impact of Language Learning Experience on ILP Performance

The second research question aimed to examine the impact of LLE on learners' ILP performance on a test of common English speech acts.

Descriptive statistics for the impact of different lengths of LLE on ILP scores are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4
Participants' ILP Scores in Terms of their LLE

LLE	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Minimum	Maximum
1 to 2 years	125	12.69	5.04	.45	4	29
3 to 5 years	269	18.97	5.67	.34	5	34
plus 6 years	106	25.83	5.46	.53	13	35
Total	500	18.85	7.05	.31	4	35

As you can see, there are apparent differences among the mean scores of three levels of LLE. To see if such differences are statistically significant or not a One-way ANOVA was applied. The results of the one-way ANOVA are presented in Table 5.

Table 5
One-way ANOVA for Participants' ILP Test Performance in Terms of LLE

ILP Scores	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	9916.43	2	4958.21	165.20	.000
Within Groups	14916.48	497	30.01		
Total	24832.91	499			

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of three levels of LLE (1 to 2 years, 3 to 5 years, and plus 6 years) on learners' ILP performance. There was a statistically significant difference at the $p < .05$ level in ILP scores for the three LLE groups: $F(2, 497) = 165.20$, $p = .000$. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for learners with plus 6 years of LLE ($M = 25.83$, $SD = 5.46$) was significantly different from learners with 3 to 5 years of LLE ($M = 18.97$, $SD = 5.67$) and learners with 1 to 2 years of LLE ($M = 12.69$, $SD = 5.04$). Learners who had an LLE of 3 to 5 years also performed significantly different from learners with 1 to years of LLE on the ILP test (see Table 6).

Table 6
Multiple Comparisons for the Impact of LLE on ILP Test Performance

(I) LLE	(J) LLE	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
1 to 2 years	3 to 5 years	-6.27*	.59	.000
	plus 6 years	-13.14*	.72	.000
3 to 5 years	plus 6 years	-6.86*	.62	.000

*. The mean difference is significant at $p < 0.05$.

Data analysis confirmed the significant role LLE played in L2 learners' speech-act ILP performance. However, it was revealed that gender as a factor did not play any significant role in ILP test performance of Iranian EFL learners.

Regarding the impact of gender on the speech-act ILP performance, the findings of this investigation are supported by the results of some other studies (Kasper & Rose, 2002; Kasper & Schmidt, 1996). The previous body of research has not unanimously and strongly supported either male or female superiority in pragmatic performance, patterns of learning and using a special speech act, and the direction of using a speech act and its response (Kasper & Rose, 2002). Some gender-related studies have supported female learners' better ILP development (Rintell, 1984; Tannen, 1991; Vellenga, 2008) or male learners' stronger ILP performance (Geluykens & Kraft, 2002, 2007; Herbert, 1990; Parisi & Wogan, 2006), whereas others have rejected any significant differences.

Kasper and Rose (2002) chose a neutral stance claiming that the role of gender on ILP performance as a biological factor cannot directly influence the ILP development and asserted that gender-based ILP acquisition depends on many sociopragmatic norms of behavior and features of the context as well. According to Kasper and Rose (2002), the current state of research on the role of gender on ILP development and performance is much like the state of earlier studies carried out on the role of gender in SLA. Kasper and Schmidt (1996) have also argued for a lack of enough gender-based ILP studies to make strong conclusions in favor of each gender's superiority in pragmatic performance and development.

LLE was reported to be an effective predictor of ILP knowledge regarding English speech acts and the conclusion was achieved that the longer the number of years spent learning a foreign language such as English is, the larger and more effective the ILP knowledge of L2 learners regarding speech acts will be. LLE means more than just the quantity of time spent learning a foreign language, it has a salient role in ILP development, because if a person continues his/her LLE over a long time, this implies higher levels of internal motivation and interest in L2 and consequently better internalization of the target language and its pragmatic knowledge (Kasper & Rose, 2002).

Of course, the findings of the current research considered quality as another aspect of LLE. The researcher checked for the "quality or effectiveness" of the participants' LLE by reviewing their language level at the institutes/centers where they were learning English. Higher performances on previous similar pragmatic or conversation tests,

learners' portfolios and self-report protocols all supported the higher quality of LLE for learners with higher ILP scores. The findings of the present investigation are supported by the findings reported by other studies. More LLE means more exposure to L2 and more exposure in turn provides more input and hence richer intake for ILP competence development (Kasper & Rose, 2002). Many studies have reported that more L2 exposure as an aspect of LLE can foster ILP knowledge (Kim, 2000; Matsumura, 2001, 2003).

5. Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

Some important logical conclusions may be drawn based on the methodology and results of this study. First, gender as a biological factor was not a determinant factor in L2 learners' speech-act performance. Such biological operational definition only delivers a static and one-dimensional view of the complex and essentially sociocultural variable of gender. The biological and neurological view towards gender should be replaced with "gender as a social practice" perspective. Being male or female means having special social positions and hence having specific patterns of interaction in both L1 and L2 (Ogiermann, 2008). As Kasper and Rose (2002) pointed out, each gender develops his/her interlanguage pragmatic knowledge based on the defined social, cultural and situational roles and characteristics of L2 context.

Second, LLE was reported to be an effective factor in the speech-act ILP performance of L2 learners. Generally more years spent learning an L2 provides more contact with the target language and more input for pragmatic competence development. Generally, when L2 learners are provided with more pragmatic input, the amount of intake is increased and the learning of speech acts as the building blocks of interlanguage pragmatic competence is facilitated.

The main pedagogical implication of the current study is that speech acts should be worked in upper-intermediate and advanced levels because learners at these levels usually have longer language experiences. The findings of the current study suggest that students with longer levels of LLE can absorb the speech acts and their sociopragmatic norms and pragmalinguistic forms in more effective ways.

Regarding the variables examined in this study, some suggestions can be made for further research. The role of gender in speech act production and comprehension can be further studied across different speech acts to determine noticeable patterns for each gender. "Gender as a social pattern approach" can be used as a framework for comparison between male vs. female L2 learners' perception, production, and effective use of English speech acts. Gender-based production of

different speech acts, why and how of their use, usage frequency, and special internal structures of different speech acts also seem to provide very promising topics for research within the fledgling domain of interlanguage pragmatics. Researchers can look for the sociocultural factors which influence gender-based comprehension and production of L2 speech acts, transferability of such differences from that L1 to L2 and each gender's tendency to use different kinds of IPLS. This study simplified the complex, multifaceted and longitudinal nature of LLE and defined it as the number of years spent learning an L2. Further research is needed to explore both quality and quantity aspects of LLE and its different underlying components. In addition, LLE can get more realistic operational definitions in more reliable research designs.

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