

Relationship between Students' Gender and their Use of Politeness Strategies in the “Results and Discussions Section” of PhD Dissertations

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Abstract

The researcher analyzed the Result and Discussion Sections of 10 dissertations of Iranian PhD students and 10 British PhD students by aiming to investigate their use of politeness strategies using Brown and Levinson's (1987) taxonomy and its relationship with the gender of the authors. The results proved that Iranian writers most frequently used negative politeness strategies, followed by positive politeness strategies. British writers, like Iranians, used negative politeness strategies more than the others. The next frequent strategy was positive politeness strategies. Moreover, there was a significant difference between the frequency of politeness strategies used by Persian and British writers. Considering the gender, there is a significant difference between the positive strategies used by male and female Iranians. In fact, unlike the Male Iranian authors who used more positive strategies, the female Iranian authors used fewer strategies and this difference was significant. However, that there was no significant difference between the positive

strategies used by British male and female participants. Also, there was a significant difference between the negative strategies used by male and female Iranians. In fact, the results show that the female Iranian authors used fewer strategies and this difference was significant. Moreover, there was a significant difference between the negative strategies used by British male and female participants.

Keywords: Politeness strategies, gender, PhD Dissertations

A. Introduction

When considering acquiring/learning L2 or even its instruction, it is well agreed that learning would be affected by diverse elements in terms of differences, among which age, context, individual, along with gender differences (Shehadeh, 1999). Gender seems to be the furthestmost imperative issue affecting this learning (Gholami, 2011). Consistent with Lakoff (1975), it is claimed that females' language ability is incomplete or poorer in comparison with that of their counterparts. As regards, a vast number of research has been conducted to investigate gender and its role in L2 learning. However, diverse studies offer the likelihood that the females' chances for L2 learning are not totally identical to that of the men (Gholami, 2011). Gender has been considered as an important feature when it comes to the interactions amongst teachers and student within the context of the classrooms, believing that the instructors' sex could affect both the excellence and magnitude of the mentioned interactions. It is proclaimed that any linguistic politeness model had better not merely aim at explaining the reason for the things said by the speakers but also to envisage imaginable impacts of such saying on the interlocutors. Moreover, such a theory is required to elucidate the way the interlocutors deal with developing the up-and-coming networks while assessing what their positions are as well as that of their interlocutors inside such a network (Monsefi & Hadidi, 2015).

Regarding the difference in males and females' way of talking, it is asserted by Lakoff (1975) that there is a huge difference between the classes taught by males and females. In line with this, Lakoff (1975) maintains that any classes run by males would have a quicker pace while experiencing abrupt shifts in the subjects being discussed. On the other hand, the females inside a classroom would act more as facilitators while being lenient toward using mother-tongue language more than male teachers. Females are also highly influential in selecting subjects while questioning far more than their counterparts. Interestingly enough, Lakoff (1975) contends that females employ tag questions more frequently, contrary to men. Indeed, it is admitted by Lakoff (1975) that the females are politer than men when it comes to language use because of their frequent use of indirectness chiefly with the aim of flattening and preserving the conversation course. To

this end, a plethora of research has been conducted with the aim of determining the association between language and gender; nonetheless, paradoxes and discrepancies have been reported meaning that it is still imperative to conduct surveys to shed light on such ambiguities (Gholami, 2011). To fulfill this objective, this study endeavored to examine the correlation existing between gender and use of politeness strategies by employing Brown and Levinson's theory to examine the politeness strategies used in the "Result and Discussion Section" of the PhD theses written by Iranian EFL graduates.

1. Statement of the Problem

The growing cultural diversity has given rise to challenges for individuals and organizations (Ang, et al., 2007). A great deal of studies has reported issues associated with cultural diversity amongst national (Tsui & Gutek, 1999) as well as multinational (Earley & Gibson, 2002) working groups and world leaders (Van Dyne & Ang, 2006). Moreover, challenges have been reported for the ones working on overseas tasks (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). However, there is paucity of research dealing with elements which might enhance the emerging multiethnic happenstances (Gelfand et al., 2007). Particularly, the enquiry in relation to the individuals' competences for multicultural efficiency has been found to be scarce and haphazard. This brings about a substantial gap to perceive the reason for some people's being efficient more than others within multicultural encounters. In fact, the individuals require numerous strategies to cast the most considerable impression not their addresses.

Inopportunately, even though there is an undeniable inter-reliant association between language teaching and business, notwithstanding a considerable progress in the two disciplines, little has been done concerning the impact of acquaintance with the interactants' culture (Hoseini et al., 2014). Meanwhile, it is asserted that even though the chief emphasis is mostly on speech, written discourse seems to be sidelined and under-researched. It is probably true that the individuals mainly are involved in face-to-face interactions with others daily in the society where they live; yet, occasionally they might be forced to interact by means of academic writings, such as a university theses and dissertations. Because the Iranian students at the postgraduate level do not receive very professional training on writing thesis, it then seems demanding for the students to write up satisfactory theses in which politeness strategies are acceptably reflected. Practically, in writing a thesis cultural cues do not exist to help us perceive if the cultural norms are followed appropriately. In fact, it is extensively confirmed that it is possible for us to impress the readers of dissertation with our own native language much more effortlessly as compared to the time we write them up with another language. Writing a thesis is one area requiring cautious consideration of the cultural differences which exist between the two distinct; if not, we would be unsuccessful because of exoticness in relation to the regulations and norms associated with the target culture. It is proposed by Kamler & Thomson (2006) that in the related literature, there is dearth of well-established resources concerning the doctoral write ups. Moreover, it is proposed that such write ups are rare elaborating on doctoral education meticulously. Although many studies have pointed out to this dearth as an issue, almost a few of them have presented methodical examinations

and arguments (Kamler & Thomson, 2006). To fill the gap, this study attempted to analyze the dissertations accomplished by TEFL graduates in Iran and compare them with the dissertations of their native counterparts in addition to seeking how the politeness strategies being used by them in the theses differed according to their gender.

2. Research Questions

1. What politeness strategies are more frequent in “Results and Discussion” section of the PhD dissertations of Iranian and British PhD students?
2. Is there any significant relationship between politeness strategies in “Results and Discussion” section of Iranian and British PhD Dissertations and their gender?

B. Literature Review

Agis (2012) could be considered as researcher examining the correlation between gender and politeness strategies by investigating the employment of such strategies in the Turkish context. Indeed, it was found in this study that there was a difference in the use of the mentioned strategies between males and females within quite similar contexts when they talk to the same individuals. Marti (2006) inspected the directness level of requests, finding that Turkish monolingual talkers favored direct strategies while the Turkish-German participants did not. As in Iran, Persian requests were explored by Nodoushan (2008) and it was observed that Persian speakers tended to employ conventionally indirect (CI) strategies. This result was congruent to others claiming that CI strategies are the greatest favored ones in other languages (Blum-Kalka, et al., 1989). Moreover, Nodoushan (2008) claimed that direct requests were scarce if a social distance existed between the speakers whereas at the absence of such distance direct requests were applied. The latter result coincides with other research (Wierzbicka, 2003). In addition, politeness principles were investigated by Akbari (2002) who concluded that diverse factors have to be taken into account in social interactions. These factors include the social distance, the attendance of the interlocutor, the liking factor, and the urgency of the act as well as the relative power of the talker over the auditor. In addition to this, it was confirmed that gender plays a striking role in interactions because of the fact that it is a social concept not independent of other social factors. However, socio-economic statuses had no influence as declared by Akbari (2002). In line with this, it is posed by Koutlaki (2002) that the Persian face is dependent on the conventionality to institute norms by means of correct socialization, rather than starting and finishing with individuals’ positive or negative faces. The Koutlaki (2002) maintains that the Persian face has a connection with social values, which is why this needs to be considered as the public face. In another independent research, Tabar (2012) examined the requests made by Persian monolingual and Turkish-Persian bilinguals using a model proposed by Blum-Kulka et al. (1984). The findings in relation to gender revealed that there were dissimilarities when using particular strategies; nonetheless, regarding the requests, contrary to men, less direct strategies were used by women in Persian while further direct strategies were used by them in Turkish. Moreover, it was proclaimed by Tabar (2012) that the socio-economic statuses had no impact with the strategies used by males or females.

Many academics have so far discussed such concepts as 'face' or 'politeness' and have recommended diverse theories in line with this. Through the last 10 years, numerous research work, both theoretically and empirically, has been presented on politeness strategies and face notion. In actual practice, majority of these research works have theorized politeness as strategic construct of social interactions (Eelen, 2001; Watts, 2003). Of these models, Brown and Levinson's taxonomy (1987) has been received the largest attention. This taxonomy states that a speech would be polite if individuals used certain verbal strategies that consider the addressees' emotions through casting respect on their 'face'. Goffman, 1967) highlighted that face includes negative and positive faces and based on this notion Brown and Levinson (1987) recommended that politeness would entail the entire strategies addressing the needs for these two. In the academia, there have been an escalating attention and focus on politeness strategies. Many studies have been conducted with a focus on the use of politeness strategies in e-mails (Crossouard & Pryor, 2009; Vinagre, 2008), computer-mediated discussions (Erika, 2010; Schallert, et al., 2009), prefaces (Meimei, 2001) as well as articles (Meldrum, 1994; Myers, 1989).

C. Research Methodology

In the model by Brown and Levinson (1987), there are five main strategies including Bald-on-record, Positive politeness, Negative politeness, Off-record, and Avoidance. In this study, the five categories of strategies were characterized as group 1 to group 5, each showing the diverse types with which the politeness strategies could be identified. Afterwards, the dissertations in the Results and Discussion section were read and analyzed by two raters line by line with the aim of enhancing the reliability. The subsequent stage in this research was to analyze each line to determine the applied strategies. Indeed, each dissertation was cautiously examined and the identified strategies were all classified, accordingly.

In this study, the researcher primarily recruited 10 EFL dissertations of PhD students who graduated from Ferdowsi University for the academic year 2012-2013. These students studied the PhD of Teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL). Also, the researcher analyzed 10 PhD Dissertations compiled by Native Speaker of English. In order to fulfill the objectives established in this study, the researcher chose the "Results and Discussion" Section of the PhD dissertations of these participants in order to explore the politeness strategies used by these participants and explore whether there is a relationship between gender and politeness strategies presented in the dissertations.

The needed dissertations were selected for the aim of analysis. Next, their dissertations (Only the Result and discussion Section) were coded to determine the occurrence of politeness subcategories. Then they were tabulated plus estimating the total frequencies. Subsequently, the frequencies of the strategies employed in both English and Persian Dissertations were contrasted. To do so, each strategy was identified being categorized in groups 1-5. Then, the Results and Discussion sections were investigated line by line by two raters. This was done to enhance the reliability while ascertaining their cogency. Each line was analyzed and codified meticulously to determine the strategies being used. At last, comparisons were established to finally examine the cultural

differences between the studied cultures in addition to exploring the associations existing between female and male writer and their employment of politeness strategies.

D. Findings

The following research question was formulated in the current research:

1. What is the frequency of British PhD students and Iranian EFL students' politeness strategies use in the Result and discussion Section of their PhD Dissertations?

As mentioned earlier, there were ten Iranian dissertations selected for the purpose of analysis in this research in addition to ten British dissertations. As for the use of politeness strategies throughout the Result and Discussion section of PhD Dissertations, this study made use of the model of Politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987). The results of the analysis for the frequency of these categories revealed interesting results reported in Table 1:

Table 1: Frequency of politeness strategy use in Iranian and British Dissertations

Participants		Bald on	Positive	Negative	Off record	Total
Iranian	N	10	10	10	10	10
	Min	0	3	149	0	0
	Max	1	22	420	0	0
	Sum	1	111	2757	0	0
British	N	10	10	10	10	10
	Min	0	0	68	0	0
	Max	0	14	338	0	0
	Sum	0	38	1853	0	0

As for category one, it is interestingly observed that British dissertations did not present the strategies on this category; on the other hand, only one Iranian dissertation used one of the strategies just for one time. It needs to be asserted that in this Iranian dissertation there was one “*suggestion*” on the Results and Discussion section of the thesis. Needless to say that disagreement (criticism), suggestion/advice, request, warning and threatening, plus imperative form are the strategies considered in this category. Because the genre of thesis/dissertation writing is specific and technical, it seems plausible

not to use for example imperative forms, warning and threatening or requests in this section of the dissertations.

Yet, both British and Iranian dissertations made use of the strategies listed in category 2. While the Iranian writers generally made use of 111 strategies, their counterparts only employed 38 strategies. Indeed, this is sum of the strategies in category 2 being used by the writers. In further details, it is observed that the ten Iranian dissertations never made use of B3, B4, and B5 which were solidarity/in-group talk, compliment, and joke, humor, respectively. Considering this finding, it seems plausible not to make use of joke and humor in the dissertations nor solidarity talk or compliment as the dissertations are very specific genre in which these strategies have no place. However, almost all the writers utilized B1 strategies, showing concern, interest, or being optimistic (Freq. 33). In addition, they used B2 strategies namely promise, guarantee, offer, and give reason (Freq. 6). As Table 4.4 demonstrates, the most frequent strategies in this category was B6, with a frequency of 72. The interesting fact is that the Iranian writers used many exaggerating words to justify their findings plus approval on the observed findings in their works.

The British writers employed only 38 strategies in category 2, around three times less. Similar to Iranians, the British never used strategies of B3, B4, and B5 which were solidarity/in-group talk, compliment, and joke, humor, respectively, nor B1 and B2 which were showing concern, interest, or being optimistic, and promise, guarantee, offer, and give reason, respectively. Yet, the only strategy being used by British writers was B6, with a frequency of 38. It seems the British writers do not tend to frequently show concern or guarantee, offer, and give reason or present solidarity/in-group talk, compliment, and joke or humor. As for exaggerations or approval, it was observed that the British writers are less willing to make use of exaggerations or approval in comparison with their Iranian counterparts.

The results of this research indicate that the strategy with the highest frequency in this research was Negative Politeness strategy in Category 3 by both British and Iranian writers. In further details, as shown by Table 4.6, the Iranians avoided using C2, C3, C4, and C6. These strategies included showing deference, indirect strategies, apologizing, or stating FTA. Yet, the most frequent strategy in this category was C5, i.e. impersonalizing the speaker and hearer and avoiding the pronouns with the frequency of 2020. To further clarify this, it needs to be asserted that the use of “**Passive Voice**” was the most detected strategy throughout the Iranian dissertations with the aim of avoiding the pronouns or impersonalizing the speakers. The next frequent strategy was C1 with the frequency of 737. This category included using modal verbs, hedges (lexical, syntactic, particles, prosody), modifiers, tentative verbs, conditional sentences (if clauses), etc. Among all, it seems that Iranian mostly tended to use modal verbs such as can, may, might, would, and so on to balance reporting the results they have obtained.

Similar to the Iranian dissertations, the British writers did not use strategies C2, C3, C4, and C6. These strategies included showing deference, indirect strategies, apologizing, or stating FTA. Like Iranians, British writers' most frequent strategies in this category was C5, using “Passive Voice” with a frequency of 1124, almost half of their counterparts.

Throughout the Results and Discussion section of the dissertations, it was observed that the writers were more willing to use direct sentences while avoiding passive sentences more than the Iranian writers. Further results regarding the mentioned findings are presented in Table 4.7.

As for category 4, i.e. indirect speech acts, none of the groups tended to use this strategy. The reason being is that the genre of dissertation writing is specific so that the writers typically avoid giving hints, association clues, and presupposing. They also avoid contradictions, or to use irony and metaphor as well as showing avoidance on rhetorical questions. They also avoid understating, overstating, or using tautologies. They are rarely ambiguous and rarely overgeneralize, or are incomplete rarely while avoiding the use of ellipsis.

As a general finding, all the writers used a variety of strategies from various categories proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987). Therefore, category five, which is avoidance category, is ignored because they all employed strategies of various kinds. Moreover, it can be concluded that both British and Iranian writers most frequently used Negative Politeness strategies, followed by Positive Politeness strategies. The least frequent category was Bald on record, while avoiding using Off-record strategies.

Having determined the frequency of politeness strategies reflected in the dissertations of British and Iranian PhD students, the following question was established:

2. Is there any significant difference between the frequency of politeness strategies used in the Result and discussion Section of Iranian and British PhD Dissertations?

To deal with the above question the following hypothesis is established:

“There is no significant difference between the frequency of politeness strategies used in the Result and discussion Section of Iranian and British PhD Dissertations?”

At first, regarding Category 2 which was positive strategies, a Chi-square statistical test was conducted for the relationship between strategy use of male and female students and the results (shown in Table 1) revealed a statistical relationship between the positive strategies used by both groups ($\chi^2 = 35.767$, $p < 0.05$). The table shows that the positive strategies utilized by the male Iranian participants ($N=87$) were beyond the expectation ($N=55.5$). On the other hand, it was found that the positive strategies were utilized by the female Iranian participants ($N=24$) less often than the expectation ($N=55.5$). Indeed, it was found that contrary to male Iranian authors who used more positive strategies, the female Iranian authors used fewer strategies and this difference was significant.

However, the results for the gender difference among the British participants were insignificant while using positive strategies. Table 1 presents no statistical relationship between the positive strategies used by both groups ($\chi^2 = 1.684$, $p > 0.05$). The table shows that the positive strategies utilized by the male British participants ($N=23$) were beyond the expectation ($N=19.5$). On the other hand, the positive strategies were found to be utilized by the female British participants ($N=15$) less often than expected ($N=19$).

Table 1. *Chi-Square Tests for positive strategies used by the male and female students of both groups*

		Observed N	Expected N	Residual	Chi- Square	df	Asymp. Sig.
Iranians	Male	87	55.5	31.5	35.757	1	.000
	Female	24	55.5	-31.5			
	Total	111					
British	Male	23	19.0	4.0	1.684	1	.194
	Female	15	19.0	-4.0			
	Total	38					

As for Category 3 which was negative strategies, a Chi-square statistical test was conducted for the difference between strategy use of male and female students. Table 2 reveals that a significant difference existed between the negative strategies used by both groups ($\chi^2 = 323.912$, $p < 0.05$). The table shows that the negative strategies utilized by the male Iranian participants (N=1851) were beyond the expectation (N=1378.5). On the other hand, the results revealed that the negative strategies were utilized by the female Iranian participants (N=906) less often than the expectation (N=1378.5). In reality, it was found that contrary to male Iranian authors who used more negative strategies, the female Iranian authors used fewer strategies and this difference was significant.

Likewise, the results for the gender difference among the British participants were significant while using negative strategies. Table 2 reveals the fact that a statistical difference existed between the negative strategies used by both groups ($\chi^2 = 82.505$, $p < 0.05$). The table shows that the negative strategies were utilized by the male British participants (N=731) less often than expected (N=926.5). On the other hand, it was found that the negative strategies utilized by the female British participants (N=1122) were more often than expected (N=19). Indeed, it was observed that contrary to female British authors who used more negative strategies, the female British authors used fewer strategies and this difference was significant.

Table 2. *Results of Chi-Square Tests for negative strategies used by the male and female students of both groups*

		Observed N	Expected N	Residual	Chi- Square	df	Asymp. Sig.
Iranians	Male	1851	1378.5	472.5	323.912	1	.000
	Female	906	1378.5	-472.5			
	Total	2757					
British	Male	731	926.5	-195.5		1	.000
	Female	1122	926.5	195.5			
	Total	1853					

Finally, for finding the difference between using politeness strategies as a whole among the male and female groups, a Chi-square statistical test was conducted for and the results shown in Table 3 indicated that a statistical difference could be observed between the politeness strategies employed as a whole by both groups ($\chi^2 = 353.697$, $p < 0.05$). The table shows that the positive strategies utilized by the male Iranian participants ($N=1937$) were beyond the expectations ($N=1433.5$). Contrariwise, the politeness strategies utilized by the female Iranian participants ($N=930$) were less often than what the researcher expected ($N=1433.5$). In contrast with the male Iranian authors who used more politeness strategies, the female Iranian authors used fewer strategies and this difference was significant.

Also, the results for the gender difference among the British participants were significant while using politeness strategies. Table 3 indicated that a statistical difference was observed between the politeness strategies employed by both groups ($\chi^2 = 1.684$, $p < 0.05$). The table shows that the politeness strategies utilized by the male British participants ($N=754$) were less often than the expectation ($N=945.5$). On the other hand, the findings proved that the politeness strategies were utilized by the female British participants ($N=1137$) more often than the expectation ($N=945.5$). Contrary to female British authors who used more politeness strategies, the female British authors used fewer strategies and this difference was significant.

Table 3. Results of Chi-Square Tests for ALL the strategies used by the male and female students of both groups

		Observed N	Expected N	Residual	Chi- Square	df	Asymp. Sig.
Iranians	Male	1937	1433.5	503.5	353.697	1	.000
	Female	930	1433.5	-503.5			
	Total	2867					
British	Male	754	945.5	-191.5	77.572	1	.000
	Female	1137	945.5	191.5			
	Total	1891					

E. Discussion

In summary, Iranian writers most frequently used negative strategies, followed by positive ones. The most frequent negative strategies by Iranians included C5, i.e. impersonalizing the speaker and hearer and avoiding the pronouns with the frequency of 2020 cases. In details, they made use of “passive Voice” more than all the other strategies. The most frequent positive strategy by Iranian was B6, with a frequency of 72 cases. Indeed, the Iranian writers used many exaggerating words to justify their findings plus approval on the observed findings in their works Iranian writers never used Off-record strategies in their dissertations but used Bald on record strategies very infrequently. British writers, like Iranians, used negative politeness strategies more than the others. The next

frequent strategy was positive politeness strategies. Similar to their Iranian counterparts, British writers' most frequent negative strategy was C5 by using "passive Voice" on top of the others. The most frequent positive strategy by the British was B6, with a frequency of 38 cases. Yet, the British writers never used Off-record or Bald on record strategies. The results finally revealed no statistical variations between the strategies employed by Iranian and British writers.

Tracy explains that negative strategies deal with individuals' desire to be unhindered while being away from obligation; on the other hand, the positive ones is a want to be valued and accepted (Tracy, 1990). Correspondingly, it is asserted that the solemnity of the imposition is determined by negative politeness within diverse cultures whereas the universal nature of the interactions between the speakers is the focus of the positive strategies (Scollon & Scollon, 1981). The fact that in this study, it was observed that negative and positive strategies ranked the highest and this is congruent with various studies reported before (for example, Amany, Davoudi, and Haghi, 2014). The fact is that both groups under this study used negative politeness strategies mostly when they tended to impersonalize the speaker or to passivize their sentences whereby the attempted to minimize the imposition on the reader's negative face (as they read the dissertations). Followed by passivation was using hedges and modal verbs on top. Moreover, they both used positive politeness strategies as their second most frequent strategies employing approval and exaggeration to report their findings and run their discussions followed by showing concern or interest or being optimistic towards their findings. The fact that in this study the researcher found that both groups showed no significant differences in their using the strategies is consistent with other studies reported in the literature (for example, Amany, Davoudi, and Haghi, 2014) and as highlighted by Brown and Levinson (1987:65-68), both positive and negative faces could be found within the cultures globally and worldwide. When considering social interactions, FTAs could be occasionally unavoidable depending on the exchanges. An FTA could innately harm the interlocutors' face as it functions against the individuals' wills. In practice, the politeness theory justifies the way the researcher redress the injuries against the face imposed by FTAs to the interlocutors. Pariera (2013) agreed that both negative and positive face wants occur to some degree at the same time. These two wants create a paradox in which both aspects of face must be projected simultaneously in any communication (Scollon & Scollon, 1995). Speakers do not choose expression of absolute negative or positive politeness, but instead choose expressions which indicate different degrees of negative and positive politeness.

It is asserted by Booher (1997), impersonalization is used to avoid personal references and helps the sender of the message not to accuse the addressee. The passive voice is a recurrent realization of this strategy, as it places responsibility on the facts or avoiding an accusatory tone. Passive constructions are useful to deal with sensitive issues with tact and diplomacy, to express objective and impartial matters. Getkham (2013) confirms in his study that the passive voice without an agent is used when the writer tries to reduce his presence. Impersonalization is a strategy employed to avoid personal references. It helps the sender to avoid accusing the receiver. The passive voice is a recurrent means of this strategy in English (Cortés de los Ríos and Cruz Martínez, 2001).

It avoids laying responsibility on the facts (Marcén Bosque, 1999). It is a useful construction to avoid an accusatory tone (Booher, 1997). The passive voice is ideal for communication that needs to be objective and impartial (Basye, 1998: 114). The passivation seamlessly complies with the impersonality of the recognized individuality (Fairclough 1989, p. 149). Even though abundant occurrences of passivation are common within formal contexts, others are purposefully found in a setting in which impersonality would be advantageous. This is why passivation could rather be dependent on a profounder outline (Magistro, 2007). As stated by Brown and Levinson (1987: 194), passivation might be employed to evade direct references to the things engaged within the FTA. Henceforth, these types of sentences could be adopted to deal with the addressees' negative faced. In practice, passivation is able to reduce the imperfection because it could help us to evade accrediting such imperfection in a direct manner (Magistro, 2007). Furthermore, the absence of the agents results in the fact that such indirect sentences be considered as general truths which point to irrepressible incidents (Magistro, 2007). Some studies suggest that many cultures consider the use of indirectness in speech strategies as offering greater politeness, such as in the use of passive voice, impersonal pronouns and metaphors (Fraser, 1990:221; Saville-Troike 2003:29; and Murphy & Levy, 2006).

After negative politeness strategies, both British and Iranian dissertations made use of positive politeness strategies. Indeed, the Iranian groups used more cases of positive politeness strategies, a finding consistent with that of Bacha, et al (2012) reporting that positive strategies could be observed with frequencies within Spanish contexts, higher than the English ones. Mutaka and Lenaka (1998) propose preference for using these strategies is to emphasize positive politeness because the writer prefers to target the addressee's positive face wants. Also, they emphasize that using positive politeness markers may be for a pre-request cultural feature. Iranian writers only used B1, B2, and B6 subcategories, while their counterparts just used B6 strategies. In both groups, using B6 subcategories ranked the first, which means the writers used many sentences showing approval or exaggerated about the findings in some ways. In some cases, they offered things (B2) or showed interest (B1) in the obtained results of their studies.

The other finding in this study was that although the British writers never used Bald on record strategies, only one case of suggestion was detected in the Iranian dissertations. Hoseini, et al (2014), investigating on using the politeness strategies in the letters, reported that numerous letters detected by the investigators showed lack of clues on the existence of bald-on strategies. In contradiction of the bald-on and off-record strategies not being used in the mentioned letters, all of them made use of positive and negative strategies. This is consistent with the findings, too. Nonetheless, the reason why the dissertations did not use Bald on record strategies can be attributed to the particular genre of dissertations being studied in this research. While writing a dissertation, the writers may not be required to use imperative forms or warning, nor posing a request. Indeed, the type of genre the writers are involved in probably determines their choice of strategies.

Considering the statistical differences observed between the Persian and British writers in using politeness strategies, such cross cultural differences have been announced by many other studies as well. Pragmatics has been reported to be highly tied with cross-

cultural communications. According to Leech (1983), the politeness principles hinge around a summary of global spoken communication concepts. Nevertheless, this supposition hinges around the western cultures considering the western manner to communicate, not being generalizable to other contexts. For this reason, linguists take issue with it to meticulously determine how far the politeness strategies could be universal, reflecting the degree to which the individuals are limited by dissimilar beliefs and norms within cross-cultural circumstances (Zhu & Bao, 2010).

To be cross-cultural means that the exchange that occurs between interlocutors would be within diverse cultural backgrounds i.e. diverse talks among individuals having diverse races or coming from diverse ethnic groups. In practice, what is discussed is to be oral and spoken exchanges among individuals having the abovementioned characteristics. In such multicultural exchanges, cultural diversities faction efficiently with respect to speech acts. Besides, the individuals have a tendency to employ the rules and concepts accepted within their cultures as norms. This is for justifying and appraising the conduct of the others. Then, such mechanism is referred to as the "pragmatic transfer" (He Zhaoxiong, 2000). For this reason, it is asserted that there is a possibility for the pragmatic failure to arise simply obstructing the multicultural exchanges.

The Discourse Completion Test (DCT) was adopted by Jalilifar (2009) to scrutinize the request strategies employed by Persian EFL learners in comparison with Australians. It was found that the pragmatic development could be observed. This was true especially for the Iranians transferring from direct to indirect strategies. Moreover, those having superior competency overused indirect requesting. Contrariwise, the Australians exhibited further sensible employment of such strategies. Conversely, those having lesser competency had an overemployment of direct strategies. Jalilifar's (2009) research was also an endeavor to examine the effect of social constructs reporting that the Iranians in his study exhibited a performance akin to that of the Australians in terms of social power. On the other hand, the former group under study had inadequate socio-pragmatic awareness to exhibit appropriate social behaviors in terms of social distances. Jalilifar (2009) took a step further and highlighted that his findings are congruent with the supposition posed by Ellis (1994) who proclaimed even the individuals being at an advanced level fail to comprehensively learn the natives' manner to pose requests, confirming that the difference exists clearly. In summary, it is admitted by Jalilifar (2009) that the Iranian participants in his study were much more similar to their counterparts regarding the impact of social constructs. However, when considering the social distance, both groups differed remarkably in terms of the kinds of strategies being used by the natives and the Iranians.

Pishghadam & Rasouli (2011) also report cross cultural differences in line with Wolfson's (1981) conception. It is proclaimed by Wolfson (1981) that there are universal differences between speech acts both for how such acts are recognized and how they are distributed and how frequent they might be. In order to examine the extent to which speech acts are universal or different, Pishghadam & Rasouli (2011) suggest that numerous research has focused cross-culturally, showing that this phenomenon is under scrutiny to shed more lights on such cross cultural differences.

Other studies in Iran also reported cross cultural differences. Hassani, et al. (2011) investigated both gender and social statuses when using refusal strategies reporting that there were insignificant differences in terms of gender. However, higher social statuses contributed to further employment of indirect refusal strategies among Iranians where directness was observed more among the natives.

In line with this, Allami and Naeimi (2011) examined Iranians' pragmatic development by investigating Iranians monolinguals, bilinguals and natives. They observed that the participants differed with respect to shifts, frequencies, as well as semantic formulae. Moreover, it was observed that direct refusal was the most frequent. They concluded that Iranians exhibited pragmatic transfer of sociocultural norms from the mother-tongue language to the second language.

Tawalbeh and Al-Oqaily (2012) conducted a research dealing with the directness and politeness in speech acts among Arabs when contrasted with natives. They found that the natives exploited more indirect strategies whereas the Arabs altered request strategies contingent with social power and distance. Moreover, there was a remarkable difference in the level of directness multi-culturally. While the natives employed direct requests once they address associates if such a request was not too imperative, the Arabs used direct strategies most frequently when addressing close friends. Indeed, such direct strategies denote attachment, intimacy, and connectedness in their culture. Such a difference has been predicted by Brown and Levinson (1978 and 1987) confirming cross-cultural diversities when realizing speech acts. In other words, individuals speaking diverse languages with diverse cultures could use similar series of speech acts but might be at variance in selecting the strategies they use (Wolfson 1989).

Again, Lee (2005) reported some cross cultural differences by analyzing requests made by natives and Chinese. It was observed that although the studied individuals used direct requests, dissimilar syntactic and lexical characteristics of requests were employed by these groups. The reason for this difference was to moderate impositive forces. While natives employed syntactic downgraders with a greater occurrence and a broader variety having fewer lexical devices, the Chinese had a tendency to minimize directness. Lee (2005) overstated that the non-natives could only perform courteously and properly if they completely comprehend the power dynamics between the addressees.

Attached the previously mentioned results above is the existence of relationship between gender and strategy use for both groups. In details, the following results were obtained about the gender difference as politeness strategy use: as for using positive strategies, there was a significant difference between male and female Iranians, in favor of Male Iranian authors using more positive strategies. However, as regards the positive strategies, there were insignificant differences between the British men and women. Another criterion was related to using the negative politeness strategies. Statistical differences were observed between the negative strategies male and female Iranians employed, in favor of males using more negative strategies. Contrariwise, Statistical differences were observed in terms of negative strategies used by British male and female participants but in favor of females. In fact, the results show that unlike the female British authors who used more negative strategies, the female British authors used fewer

strategies than expected. Yet, the results for gender difference and politeness strategy use as a whole proved that significant differences existed in terms of politeness strategies being used as a whole by male and female Iranians again in favor of males while significant differences existed between the politeness strategies being employed by British writers on the side of females. To put it in a nutshell, Iranian male participants more politeness strategies than the Iranian females but the reverse was true for the British participants as the females used more politeness strategies, as a whole.

The above mentioned findings are somewhat consistent with the claims posited by Lakoff (1975). It is stated that females would recognize their status with respect to the males affiliated to them. Moreover, females have a tendency to employ indirect requests, apologies, and qualifiers more than males. Although it is well agreed that males and females have differences in terms of using and interpreting politeness (Cordella, 1991; Ide, 1992; Mills, 2003), there is a dearth of survey to particularly elaborate on gender differences with respect to politeness strategies both in EFL and ESL contexts. In practice, a noteworthy gap exists with regard to this issue especially across diverse cultures.

The findings are also congruent in terms of gender difference with the reports announced by Ide (1992). Indeed, in the mentioned research, polite speech was investigated finding that Japanese females exhibited further polite strategies in comparison with their counterparts. It was then concluded that such variations occurred due to respect and conduct which are characteristics aspects in the studied setting.

By investigating males and females who give orders, Smith (1992) maintained that the variations exist concerning the gender generally and specifically when politeness is taken into account. As such, Saito (2010) reported that the interlocutors' gender imposes a part while choosing directive forms. Moreover, Cordella (1991) elaborated on apologies finding that positive politeness strategies had a higher frequency among Spanish speakers as compared with the English speakers and pointed out that the interlocutors' genders have high importance in this regard. In line with, Brown (1990) inspected interactional particulars of a court case showing that the courtroom's certain setting made direct face-to-face confrontation possible while such interactions were intolerable with the other settings and distorted gender connotations.

Farghal and Al-Khatib (2001) reported gender to be a crucial element that affects forming and accepting and rejecting a compliment. What is more, Manasrah and Al-Delaimi's (2008) reported that gender is influential in selecting the strategies. Nonetheless, the inconsistencies about the results and the results of cross cultural studies require more detailed and thorough scrutiny of the gender difference (Bacha, et al, 2012). Alizadeh (2008) announces the existence of variations related to gender among Iranians when using politeness strategies. Yet, this study failed to reach an agreement after all.

Though, the results related to gender are inconsistent with the findings reported by Sa'd and Mohammadi (2014). Insignificant difference was reported for the men and women in their study when using politeness and refusal strategies. Moreover, Hassani et al. (2011) found no statistical differences concerning the gender while reporting that higher social statuses could contribute to their using indirect refusal strategies in Persian.

It was also found that direct strategies were preferred mostly in English. This inconsistency between the results and the two studies addressed above can be attributed to the type of genre in which the politeness strategies were scrutinized. In this case, using the politeness strategies in the Results and Discussion Section of the Dissertations could be in turn a daunting and specified type of genre in which using the strategies might be limited to certain categories. Yet, the findings are congruent with many other reports confirming the difference between male and female participants in using politeness strategies.

F. Conclusions

The results proved that Iranian writers most frequently used negative politeness strategies, followed by positive politeness strategies. British writers, like Iranians, used negative politeness strategies more than the others. The next frequent strategy was positive politeness strategies. Moreover, there was a significant difference between the frequency of politeness strategies used by Persian and British writers. Considering the gender, there is a significant difference between the positive strategies used by male and female Iranians. In fact, unlike the Male Iranian authors who used more positive strategies, the female Iranian authors used fewer strategies and this difference was significant.

G. Implications of the findings

This study and its results have several noteworthy implications for English teachers and other researchers. First, the number of politeness cases used by Iranian writers was almost more than their counterparts and this was significant. Therefore, the educationalists should know that there is such a difference/gap in the Results and Discussion section of the dissertations in terms of using politeness strategies, meaning that the nonnative speakers in Iran use these strategies differently from the Native writes. Therefore, further detailed studied on politeness strategies must be conducted to shed lights on the causes of such a difference and it should be a big concern for the educationalists to focus on improving the Iranian writers' ability in writing dissertations.

Gender difference is another area to be considered as this variable mediates with the politeness strategy use. Those who are concerned with gender differences should be aware that such a difference implies that the Iranians make use of politeness strategies in their dissertations differently depending on their gender and that the use of strategies vary with that of the native speakers. After all, curriculum designers and syllabus designers should seek for other variables which might affect the students' abilities in writing theses and dissertations and other research work.

The findings in the current study could assist material developers in understanding fundamental and frequent politeness strategies so that they would take them into account while designing pedagogic materials for better education as well as designing more efficient materials for thesis writing. Moreover, they could refer to these findings for a better selection of the materials aimed at presenting politeness strategies. Those being involved in teacher training programs could refer to the results reported in the current

study in order to better prepare the teachers for their future teaching experiences as to what degrees they need to concentrate on instructing the employment of politeness strategies in their classes. These findings are especially beneficial for researchers to better understand the politeness phenomenon and to know how different using these strategies might be in cross-cultural contexts, which finally assist them in writing more appropriate dissertations or research papers.

H. Suggestions for Future Studies

Considering the results of this study, the following suggestions are made for future studies:

1. It is crucial that other studies be conducted within settings different from that of this research in order to find out if the findings of this study are obtained, either they are confirmed or disconfirmed and this could bring about further understanding to the body of knowledge.
2. Number of dissertations being scrutinized was limited and doing a research on a bigger sample would either confirm or disconfirm the findings.
3. Also, the researcher only focused on the Results and Discussion section of the dissertations; therefore, examining other parts such as abstracts, acknowledgements, backgrounds, problem statement, etc. are highly recommended.
4. The researcher only focused on the Results and Discussion section of the PHD dissertations but other studies could deal with the master theses, too.
5. The relationship of variables other than gender with strategy use should be examined as well.

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