

A Comparative Study of the Use of Disagreement Strategies Among Iranian EFL Learners and Native Speakers of English

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the similarities and differences between Iranian EFL learners and English native speakers in terms of the pattern of using different disagreement strategies in relation to people with different social power status. To this end, 90 participants, including 30 Iranian university students majoring in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL), 30 native English speakers, and 30 native speakers of Persian with no English proficiency were selected to fill out a discourse completion test (DCT). The DCT was comprised of scenarios simulating natural situations in order to elicit the respondents' reactions while disagreeing with people of higher, equal and lower status. To analyze the responses, Muntigl and Turnbull's (1998) taxonomy for classifying disagreement strategies was used and the strategy tokens for each type of disagreement were tallied and recorded. The results of descriptive analysis of the data revealed that the Persian native speakers used direct contradictions more than the EFL learners and English native speakers who participated in the current study, whereas the English native speakers used counterclaims and contradictions followed by counterclaims more than their EFL and Persian native counterparts. That is, the English native speakers were more concerned with saving their interlocutors' positive face while expressing disagreement with people of higher, equal, and lower status. Besides, the findings of the study implied that despite the variation between the three groups of participants in terms of their preferences for using different disagreement strategies, the only significant difference was found with respect to disagreement with people of equal status.

Keywords: disagreement strategies, Iranian EFL learners, pragmatics, English native speakers

INTRODUCTION

One of the primary goals of learning a second/foreign language is achieving the mastery of communicative skills which enables language learners to communicate effectively with native speakers in real contexts (Larsen-Freeman, 1986; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Hence, over the past few decades, EFL teachers around the world, including Iran,

have been encouraged to employ Communicative Language Teaching Methods in their English classrooms to help the EFL learners improve their communicative abilities to use English appropriately for their communicative aims including making a request, making a promise, giving thanks, extending an invitation, and the like (Chang, 2011).

Due to the change of focus on language teaching from linguistic competence to communicative competence, the notion of communicative competence has attracted lots of attention (Chang, 2011; Littlewood, 2007). The concept of communicative competence was first defined by Hymes (1971) as “a wide term including not only linguistic knowledge but also knowledge of a set of sociolinguistic codes and rules for using them” (p.16). Based on the definition stated by Hymes (1971), communicative competence can be considered as an underlying knowledge including grammatical competence (knowledge of form and meaning) as well as pragmatics competence (knowledge of conditions and manner of appropriate use). Having a similar point of view, Fraser, Rintell, Walters (1980) explained pragmatics competence as “the ability of second language learners to use the language in a social context to perform the various speech acts of requesting, apologizing, and the like” (p. 78). Moreover, pragmatic competence in Yule’s (1996) explanation is “the ability to deal with meaning as communicated by a speaker and interpreted by a listener and to be able to interpret people’s intended meanings, their assumptions, their purposes and goals” (p. 34).

Considering the crucial role of pragmatic competence in establishing an effective communication in second/foreign language, most linguists and researchers have paid more attention to the field of pragmatics (e.g., Fraser et al., 1980; Katz & Fodor, 1963; Levinson, 1983; Yule, 1996). Pragmatics, which was originally placed within philosophy of language (Morris, 1938), has been extensively used in the field of second/foreign language learning and teaching recently. Yule (1996) defined pragmatics as the study of how language is used in communication (p.3). In another definition proposed by Crystal (1997), 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” (p.301). Cohen (1996) also, explained pragmatics as the study of correlation between utterances and the functions that speakers intend to perform through those utterances considering the characteristics of the context of language use which determine the appropriateness of the utterances. Cohen (1996) stated that in order to establish an effective communication, two levels of abilities are needed namely, sociocultural ability and sociolinguistic ability. Sociocultural ability is used to determine which speech act is appropriate based on the culture involves the situation, the speaker’s background variables, and relationship. Sociolinguistic ability, on the other hand, constitutes the speakers’ control over the actual language forms used to realize the speech acts such as making an apology, making a request, expressing admiration, expressing disagreement, and the like.

Disagreement, an example of speech act, expressed by interlocutors to express their dissatisfaction with the other interlocutors or their different opinion and perceptions

toward the issues in communication such as the phrases “*No, I don’t like this one*” and “*I do not agree*” (Behnam & Niroomand, 2011). The speech act of disagreement has a crucial role in everyday interactions due to the fact that it is almost impossible that all people, even those who live in the same community, have the exact similar opinion and perception on certain issues in various settings. Thus, people use disagreement in their communication to express their own opinions (Sofwan & Suwignyo, 2011). The main point, as Brown (2007) explained, is that people try to politely turn down someone else’s offer or to express their different opinion without hurting other peoples’ feelings. In this regard, the use of politeness strategies is vital for maintaining the interlocutor’s face and it can be said that applying an appropriate strategy to show disagreement can decrease the possible danger of threatening the face of the addressee (Behnam & Niroomand, 2011). Considering disagreement as a face-threatening verbal behavior, as Brown and Levinson (1987) stated, people try to use different strategies to soften their disagreement, considering both concepts of politeness and hierarchy (Bavarsad & Simin, 2015).

The findings of the research in the field of pragmatics in foreign language learning and teaching have revealed that EFL learners’ lack of pragmatic competence can lead to communication breakdown despite their high level of linguistic knowledge and proficiency (Bavarsad, Eslami-Rasekh, & Simin, 2015; Behnam & Niroomand, 2011; Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993; Norouzi, 2015). Achieving pragmatic competence in a foreign language is a challenging task for most of FL learners. This complication might be due to the differences exist in different cultures, values, assumptions, expectation, and background knowledge. Besides, the influence of social factors (i.e., solidarity, gender, age, social status, and power) and the lack of pragmatic competence related to these factors can lead to a breakdown in communication (Sofwan & Suwignyo, 2011).

In spite of the vast body of research delved deeply into EFL learners’ pragmatic competence exploring some speech acts like request and complaint (e.g., Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989; Carrell, 1981; Hassall, 2003; Olshtain & Weinbach, 1993; Trosborg, 1995), the speech act of disagreement have escaped the scholars’ attention to a great extent (Behnam & Niroomand, 2011; Bavarsad et al., 2015; Niroomand, 2012). This study was thus an attempt to identify various disagreement strategies used in different communication contexts considering the social factor of power in Iran.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The notion of speech acts theory is a widely accepted sub-domain of pragmatics which has evolved considerably from the early work initiated by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969). It is rooted in the claim that most human utterances can be regarded as actions fulfilling certain functions to reach certain goals (e.g., Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). The point of Austin’s (1962) statement was that every utterance has both a descriptive and an effective aspect; That is, saying something is also doing something. In fact, he argued, statements do not even have any privileged position. Austin (1962) defined speech acts as actions performed in saying something and he distinguished three kinds of acts, namely *locutionary act* (the literal meaning of the utterance), *illocutionary act* (the

social function of the utterance), and *perlocutionary* act (the effect produced by the utterance in a given context) (cited in Laurence & Gregory, 2004, pp. 47-48). As Austin (1962) stated, the human utterances are regarded as actions fulfilling certain functions. Therefore, speech act theory attempt to explore how speakers use language to attain intended actions as well as how hearers infer intended meaning from what has been said (Austin, 1962 as cited in Sofwan & Suwignyo, 2011).

Disagreement is an example of speech acts which is expressed in the process of interaction to indicate speaker's opinion contrary to the view expressed by the previous interlocutor (Edstrom, 2004). The term disagreement explained by Sacks (1973) as the concept of a dis-preferred action which is based on the notion of preference. He argued that "preference for agreement should be conceived as part of the structural organization of the interaction instead of a matter of individual preferences or choices" (p. 65). As a matter of fact, Sacks (1973) asserted that when a statement on conversation requires an agreement, the interlocutors readily express agreement, whereas in the context of disagreement, the speakers usually show a marked reluctance and hesitance to express their disagreement (p. 58). From the explanation stated above, it can be concluded that disagreement by its nature is a face-threatening act which threatens the solidarity between the interlocutors in a given interaction.

The notion of "face" introduced first through Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) politeness theory. In this theory they argued that face is "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 61). Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) further distinguished two basic types of face: firstly, positive face, or the need to be valued, liked, admired, and to maintain a positive self-image; and secondly, negative face or the need not to be imposed upon, the need for relative freedom of thought and action, or for one's own space. That is, politeness, as a universal phenomenon, associates positive face with identity and consensus, and negative face with territorial security, freedom of action and privacy. Therefore, as it was stated earlier, the speech act of disagreement is a highly face-threatening act which can result in negative social relations thus people try to employ politeness strategies while expressing disagreement to reduce the threat they are imposing on the hearers' face as well as to avoid judging impoliteness by other interlocutors (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 71). Brown and Levinson (1987, pp. 112-113) proposed two politeness strategies to reduce face-threatening: 1. Seek agreement (e.g., by engaging in safe topics), and 2. Avoid disagreement (e.g., by using token agreement, hedging, and white lies) (as cited in Samar, Abaszadeh, & Pourmohamadi, 2013). Interestingly, they suggested that more direct strategies of disagreement are preferred to less direct strategies in three situations: when there is less social distance between the speaker and addressee; when the speaker has greater power than the addressee; and when the severity of disagreement is less.

Considering various contexts of communication, people express different types of disagreement. In this regard, researchers have suggested a classification of disagreement strategies which can avail themselves to examine the speech act of

disagreement. One of the well-known classification, proposed by Muntigl and Turnbull (1998), distinguishes four types of disagreement namely, Irrelevancy Claims (IC), Challenges (CH), Contradictions (CT), and Counterclaims (CC). The four types of disagreement mentioned above, could be elaborated as follows (Muntigl & Turnbull, 1998, pp. 229-231).

Irrelevancy Claims: Irrelevancy claims are meta-dispute acts that make a comment on the conversational interactions. These types of disagreement indicate that there is not any correlations between the previous claim and the topic of the given discussion. These are marked by words and expressions, like “*It doesn’t matter*”, “*You’re straying off the topic*”, and “*It is nothing to do with it*”.

Challenges: The second type of disagreement in classification suggested by Muntigl and Turnbull (1998), challenges, has typically the syntactic form of interrogative with question particles such as when, what, who, why, where and how. These are statements in which an interlocutor disagrees with prior turn. This type does not make a specific claim. This type implicates that the addressee cannot provide evidence for his claim. It is worth mentioning that, by posing a threat to the positive face of the interlocutor, challenges might be considered as impolite.

Contradictions: In the third type, an interlocutor contradicts with uttering the negated proposition expressed by the previous claim. Contradictions are often marked by negative particles like “*no*” or “*not*” like “*No, I don’t*”, indicating that the contradiction of the prior claim is true.

Counterclaims: With the last type, counterclaims, speakers propose an alternative claim that does not directly contradict or challenge others’ claim. Further negotiation of the previous claim is provided by them. They tend to be preceded by pauses, prefaces, and mitigating devices like “*maybe your right, but...*”. The strategies of avoiding explicit disagreement such as using positive markers, partial agreement or hedges can indicate indirectness and being polite in the speech act of disagreement.

It is worth mentioning that, considering Muntigl and Turnbull’s (1998) suggestion which there might exist a fifth type of disagreement as the combination of two types of disagreement namely, Contradictions and Counterclaims, the current research employed five types of disagreement for achieving its aims namely, Irrelevancy Claims (IC), Challenges (CH), Contradictions (CT), Counterclaims (CC) and the combination of Contradictions followed by Counterclaims (CT & CC). Proposing the classification of disagreement types Muntigl and Turnbull (1998) also arranged these types in an order from the most to the least face-threatening disagreement. Based on this order, Irrelevancy claim (IC) is the most face-threatening strategy, Challenge is the second face-threatening disagreement strategy, Contradiction (C) held in the next place after IC and CH and finally, Counterclaim (CC) stands as the least face-threatening type of disagreement (Behnam & Niroomand, 2011).

It should be declared that the choice of these disagreement strategies in the process of communication, relies heavily on the cultural differences between the interlocutors. However, the concept of politeness is universally acceptable, the meaning of politeness might vary across cultures, genders, and power relations. Therefore, expressing different types of disagreement vary in different cultures (Guodong & Jing, 2005 as cited in Bavarsad et al., 2015). Moreover, as Brown and Levinson (1987, pp. 112-113) stated there are some social factors that have to be taken into account while expressing disagreement. Social factors such as solidarity, gender, age, social status or power can be regarded as the factors which influence these differences (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989).

Power plays a crucial role in expressing disagreement in a given communication setting. That is, the social status of interlocutors (e.g., the status of professors, administrators, students, parents, and friends) affects the use of an appropriate disagreement by interlocutors, considering politeness and hierarchy (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Considering this importance, various studies have been conducted to explore the speech act of disagreement according to different social factors in different EFL contexts such as the research conducted by Guodong and Jing (2005), Liu (2005), Liang and Han (2005), and Miao (2006) in Mandarin Chinese; the investigation of Moyer (2000) in Spanish contexts (as cited in Sofwan & Suwignyo, 2011); the study of Beebe and Takahashi (1989) in Japanese; the examination of Dogacay-Aktuna and Kamisli (1996) in Turkish settings (as cited in Behnam & Niroomand, 2011); and the research of Bell (1998) in Korean contexts.

Considering the act of disagreement, Rees-Miller (2000) investigated the choice of linguistic markers which used to soften or strengthen disagreement in university courses and academic conversations in the United States. The act of disagreement was examined in terms of the factors of power, severity and context and the findings revealed that professors use more markers of positive politeness when disagreeing with students than do peers disagreeing with each other or students disagreeing with professors. The findings indicated that while power and severity are useful starting points for examining how disagreement is expressed in academic contexts, the purpose and particular context within which the disagreement occurs exert powerful influence on how the disagreement is expressed.

In EFL context of Iran, considering the effects of gender and culture in applying various disagreement strategies, Parvaresh and Eslami-Rasekh (2009) examined the performance of eighty native Farsi-speaking women regarding solidarity and deference as two effective contextual variables. The data analysis based on the Leech's (1995) classification of illocutionary functions indicated that women employ conflictives, which have the most impolite intention, mainly when and where the addressee is of the same gender while the considerations of deference overrode those of solidarity when Iranian women wanted to disagree with their close friends in opposite gender.

In another research, Behnam and Niroomand (2011) examined the effect of power relations on the choice of different types of disagreement used by Iranian EFL learners with different level of proficiency. The data analysis based on the taxonomy of types of

disagreement proposed by Muntigl and Turnbull (1998) provided some evidences for the relation between the learners' level of language proficiency and types of disagreement and choices of politeness strategies associated with people with different power status.

Mehregan, Eslami-Rasekh, Dabaghi, and Jafari Seresht (2013) explored disagreement used by 42 Iranian male and female speakers. Regarding formal and informal contexts, the researchers observed that both the respondents tend to be more non-confrontational when they express their disagreement in formal context. Concerning the gender effect, the result of their study revealed that the female respondents tend to be more indirect and less aggressive than the male respondents and the gender effect was observed through female speeches in the greater degree of formality of disagreements, whereas the male respondents are more confrontational in expressing disagreement than female group.

In a similar research to that of Behnam and Niroomand (2011), Norouzi (2015) investigated the influence of politeness strategies in different disagreement selection by a group of Iranian intermediate and advance EFL learners including 25 male and 25 female. Observing the 'counterclaims' as the most frequent strategy used by Iranian EFL learners, the researcher concluded that speakers propose an alternative claim with the use of counterclaims that does not directly contradict or challenge other's claim.

Bavarsad et al. (2015) explored the influence of two social factors namely, gender and power on various types of disagreement expressed by 50 young Iranian EFL university students (both male and female students). Interestingly, beside the taxonomy introduced by Muntigl and Turnbull's (1998), the researcher found four other patterns that were used frequently by both males and females. The patterns were introduced as *Thanking* (in which the disagreement to the situation started with a thanking word), *Mitigation of apology* (in which the participants started their disagreement with a word of apology), *Providing reason* (in which the participant tended to give reason instead of showing direct disagreement), *Mitigation of God willing* (which was completely related to the participants' culture and religion). The researchers stated that all these four patterns were considered to save the interlocutors' face as there was no direct contradiction.

Taken together, the previous research on speech act of disagreement, mentioned above, demonstrated that adopting different strategies to express disagreement in a particular social setting varies based on the interlocutors' cultural differences thus, there is a real need for further research on speech acts in different cultures. Besides, comparing the findings of such studies with that of English native speakers could help EFL learners improve their pragmatic competence to avoid cultural misunderstanding. Therefore, the current contrastive research sought to investigate the similarities and differences in employment of disagreement strategies between three groups of Persian native speakers, Iranian EFL learners, and English native speakers to identify various disagreement types used in different communication contexts considering three

settings of social power (i.e., higher status, equal status, and lower status). To this end, the current research attempted to address the following research questions:

- 1- Are there any significant differences between native speakers of Persian, Iranian EFL learners, and native speakers of English regarding the disagreement strategies used for people of higher status?
- 2- Are there any significant differences between native speakers of Persian, Iranian EFL learners, and native speakers of English regarding the disagreement strategies used for people of equal status?
- 3- Are there any significant differences between native speakers of Persian, Iranian EFL learners, and native speakers of English regarding the disagreement strategies used for people of lower status?

METHOD

Participants

To fulfill the research goals, three different groups of participants were participated in the study namely, EFL learners (EFL), native speakers of English (NSE), and native speakers of Persian (NSP). The participants of the first group (EFL) were 30 male and female students selected randomly from the cohort of students majoring in Teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) at one of the three universities of Khorasgan Azad University, the University of Isfahan, and Najafabad Azad University. All these participants, who were supposed to be at upper intermediate to advanced level, were also given the Quick Placement Test (UCLES, 2001) to guarantee their homogeneity in terms of English proficiency level. Based on the results, the scores obtained by the students fell within the range of 40 to 54 (out of 60) implying that EFL learners were at upper intermediate to advanced level. To provide a good touchstone against which the performance of non-native EFL learners would be evaluated, the second group of participants including 30 male and female native speakers of English were invited to participate in the study among the population of American, Canadian, and Australian nationals. Finally, the last group, as Persian native speakers group, consisted of 30 male and female native speakers of Persian. The rationale behind the Inclusion of the third study group was comparison of Persian native speakers' semantic formulas with those of the EFL learners. These participants had no or little exposure to English language in their whole life and were selected randomly from the students of other majors in the three abovementioned universities. It is worth mentioning that the three groups were matched in terms of age ranged from 23 to 30 years old.

Instruments

The first instrument utilized for checking the EFL learners' proficiency level was the QPT (UCLES, 2001), developed by Oxford University Press and Cambridge ESOL. The QPT contained 60 multiple-choice questions, in two parts, intended to assess the

learners' knowledge of English lexicon, grammatical points, and reading comprehension.

In order to measure the participants' use of politeness strategies in expressing disagreement with people of different power status, a written Discourse Completion Test (DCT), borrowed from the studies by Takahashi and Beebe (1993) and Guodong and Jing (2005), utilized in the current study. The DCT was designed in the form of a questionnaire simulating five natural situations (scenario) to which the respondents were expected to react demonstrating how they disagree with people in different power status (see the appendix). The DCT describes situations that both Persian and English native speakers may counter in everyday life and seeks to elicit responses to such situations. The selection of disagreement situations in DCT was based on social power of the interlocutors. Accordingly, the five scenarios in the DCT were developed according to various degrees of power among interlocutors including higher power status (two scenarios involving a professor and a boss), equal power status (two scenarios including a friend and a classmate), and lower power status (one scenario for a younger sister). The participants were asked to produce appropriate and natural disagreement utterances for a given context of situations in the DCT.

The content validity of the test was established by the approval of three experts in the field TEFL teaching at the sample universities of the study. Prior to the main study, The DCT was piloted on five Iranian EFL learners as well as five native English speakers to make sure of comprehensibility of the instrument's language. To ensure the maximum comprehension on behalf of the Persian native participants with little or no English proficiency competence, the DCT was translated into Persian. To save the instrument's validity for the translated version, the researcher consulted with a proficient translator, chosen from the teaching staffs of Islamic Azad University of Khorasgan, and his suggestions and observations were well taken into consideration. The final Persian version of the DCT were then piloted on five native speakers of Persian to see if the language was comprehensible for subjects, and based on their responses a few changes were made.

Data Collection Procedures

This study mainly aimed to investigate the role of power on the choice of appropriate politeness strategies when uttering the speech act of disagreement. To collect the data required to answer the questions raised in the current study, first, the Persian Version of the DCT was given to the 30 Persian native speakers aiming to obtain generalizable conclusions about the strategies of disagreement adopted by native Persian speakers in Iran. Afterwards, the DTC was administered to the second group of participants, comprised of 30 Iranian EFL learners, while the researcher was available during the administration process to answer any possible questions. Finally, 30 native speakers of English from three different countries of Australia, Canada, and the United States of America filled in the DTC to provide a touchstone against which the data from Persian speakers were measured. As for the native speakers of English, the DCTs were sent to them via e-mail and sent back to the researcher. The participants were asked to produce

appropriate disagreement utterances for the given scenarios in DCT. The participants in all groups were given enough time to write their answers to each situation. Finally, the data collected from all the three groups of participants were analyzed as discussed below.

Data Analysis

The present study employed a quantitative analysis approach to investigate the possible differences among native speakers of Persian, Iranian EFL learners, and native speakers of English with respect to disagreement strategies used for people of (a) higher status, (b) equal status, and (c) lower status. The analytical approach adopted to analyze the data gathered through administration of the DCT included three different phases. First, all the responses were meticulously read by the researcher and the total number of valid responses was determined disregarding the sketchy responses. In the second step, to classify the responses in terms of different disagreement strategies, the taxonomy proposed by Muntigl and Turnbolls' (1998) was utilized and the strategy types used to show disagreement with each of the scenarios were tallied and recorded accordingly. Employing this taxonomy, five types of disagreement were identified: Irrelevancy Claims (IC), Challenges (CH), Contradictions (CT), Counterclaims (CC) and the combination of Contradictions followed by Counterclaims (CT&CC). After analyzing the data and coding them into the five categories mentioned above by the researcher, a further analysis and classification was done by another expert in TEFL to maximize the reliability of the data. The elicited data sets by the two judges (the researcher and the expert) were used to calculate inter-raters reliability utilizing Pearson product moment coefficient formula. According to the results, the strong correlation between the two sets of data ($r=.756, p<.01$) indicated an acceptable degree of inter-rater agreement. To analyze the data descriptively, the frequency and percentage of different strategies used by the respondents to each of the scenarios were tabulated in the form of cross tables. A visual representation of the data was displayed through bar graphs as well. Finally, Chi-square tests were conducted to scrutinize the significance of the potential differences between the three groups of participants in the use of disagreement strategies under three DCT-driven situations.

RESULTS

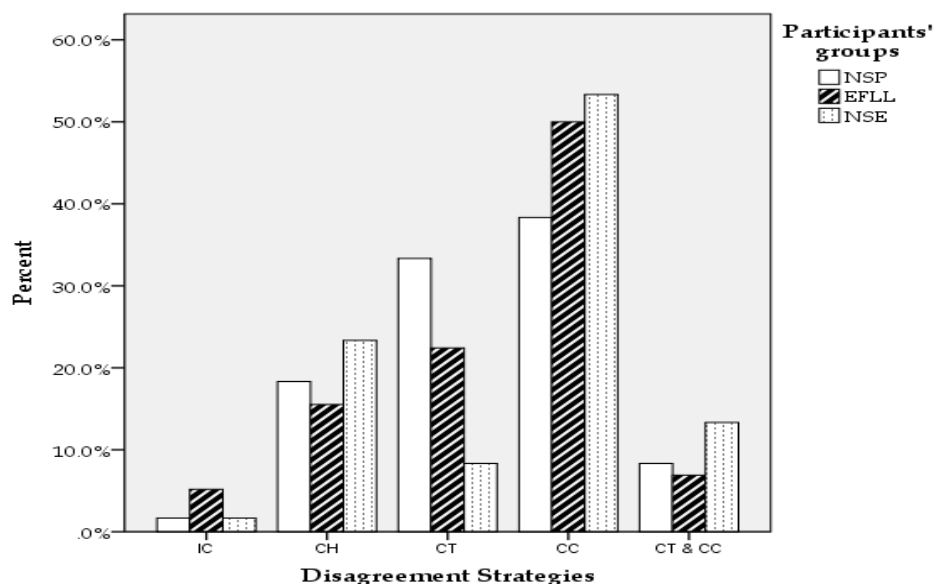
Strategies Used for Higher Status

Table 1 shows the frequency and percentage of the different disagreement strategies used by the native speakers of Persian (NSP), Iranian EFL learners (EFL), and native speakers of English (NSE) to express disagreement with people of higher status (i.e. disagreement with a supervisor and a boss, respectively). The percentage of using each type of disagreement strategies was calculated by dividing the frequency of the strategy used to express disagreement by the total number of valid responses provided by the participants.

Table 1. Cross Tabulation Results for Disagreement Strategies Used for People of Higher Status

		Type of disagreement					Total Valid Responses	
		IC	CH	CT	CC	CT & CC		
Participants' groups	NSP	Count	1	11	20	23	5	60
		% within groups	1.7%	18.3%	33.3%	38.3%	8.3%	100.0%
	EFL	Count	3	9	13	29	4	58
		% within groups	5.2%	15.5%	22.4%	50.0%	6.9%	100.0%
	NSE	Count	1	14	5	32	8	60
		% within groups	1.7%	23.3%	8.3%	53.3%	13.3%	100.0%
Total	Count	5	34	38	84	17	178	
	% within groups	2.8%	19.1%	21.3%	47.2%	9.6%	100.0%	

As Table 1 displays, the responses provided by all the NSE and NSP to both items representing higher status were regarded as valid answers (N=60), whereas one of the EFL learners' responses to both items were identified as invalid (N=58). The differences among NSP, EFL, and NSE were most noticeable with regard to the strategy of CT; where the NSE used this strategy far less than the NSP and EFL did. For the other disagreement strategies, the differences among the three groups of participants were infinitesimal. The least frequently used strategy by the three groups of participants was IC (2.8%) and the more frequent strategy used by them was CC (47.2%) in total. Figure 1 shows a visual representation of the results mentioned above.

**Figure 1.** Disagreement Strategies Used By the Three Study Groups for People of Higher Status.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the NSP participants tended to use CT more than their EFL and NSE counterparts. The EFL used IC more than the NSP and NSE respondents. Also, the NSE members' percentage of using CH, CC, and CT&CC were higher than the corresponding percentage for the NSP and EFL. However, it seems that the differences

among the three groups of respondents with regard to each disagreement strategy seem not to be substantial.

To explore whether or not the differences in the use of disagreement strategies among the NSP, EFLL, and NSE were of statistical significance, Chi-square test was conducted at .05 level of significance. The results are summarized as in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Chi-Square Results for Disagreement Strategies Used for People of Higher Status

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	14.505 ^a	8	.070
Likelihood Ratio	15.211	8	.055
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.212	1	.271
N of Valid Cases	178		

As displayed in Table 2, the association between the participants' group (NSP, EFLL, and NSE) and the Preferred type of disagreement was found to be statistically non-significant ($\chi^2(8) = 14.505, p > .05$); that is, the differences among the NSP, EFLL, and NSE with respect to the frequencies of different disagreement strategies they used was not statistically significant.

Strategies Used for Equal Status

Table 4.1 shows the frequency and percentage of the different Disagreement Strategies Used by the three study groups to express disagreement with People of equal status (i.e. disagreement with a friend and with a classmate, respectively).

Table 3. Cross Tabulation Results for Disagreement Strategies Used for People of Equal Status

		Type of disagreement					Total Valid responses	
		IC	CH	CT	CC	CT & CC		
Participants'	NSP	Count	1	10	20	25	2	58
		% within groups	1.7%	17.2%	34.5%	43.1%	3.4%	100.0%
	EFLL	Count	2	3	17	32	6	60
		% within groups	3.3%	5.0%	28.3%	53.3%	10.0%	100.0%
	NSE	Count	0	6	9	37	8	60
		% within groups	0.0%	10.0%	15.0%	61.7%	13.3%	100.0%
	Total	Count	3	19	46	94	16	178
		% within groups	1.7%	10.7%	25.8%	52.8%	9.0%	100.0%

According to Table 3, there were differences in all the strategy types among the NSP, EFLL, and NSE respondents. The differences were remarkably noticeable with respect to CH, CT, and CT&CC but negligible in the case of Irrelevancy claims (IC). As the above table shows, the least frequently used strategy by the three groups of participants was IC (1.7%) and the most frequent strategy used by all the three groups was CC (52.8%).

Figure 2 shows exactly where the differences among the three groups of participants were.

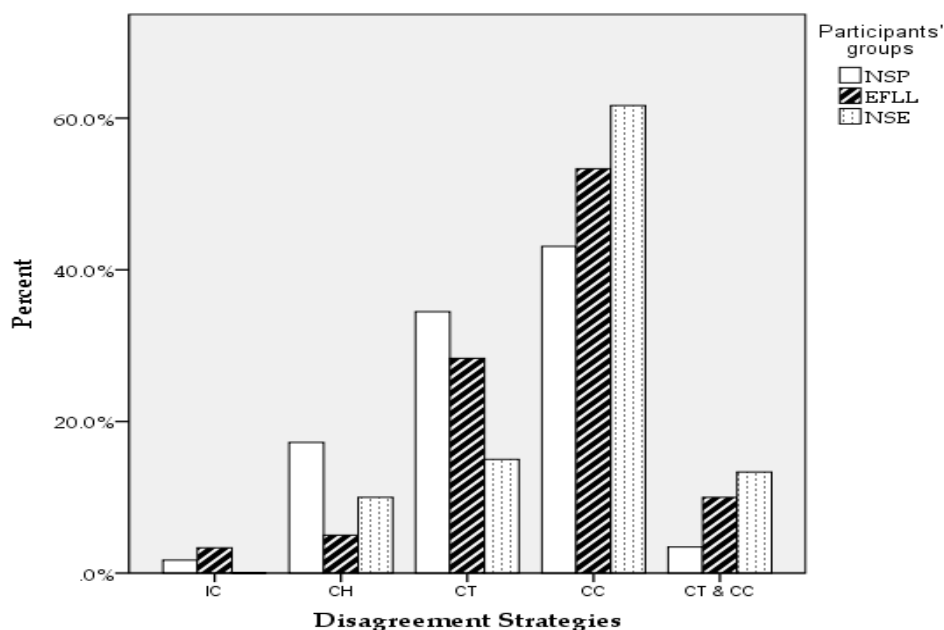


Figure 2. Disagreement Strategies Used by the Three Study Groups for People of Equal Status.

Taking a quick look at Figure 2, one can easily infer that however CC and CT, respectively, were the most frequently used strategies by all three groups of the study, the distributions of frequencies for different types of disagreement strategies among the NSP, EFLL, and NSE were not the same. Comparing the three groups of respondents, the NSP participants tended to disagree with a person of equal status using CT and CH more than their counterparts in the other two groups, while the only strategy used by EFLL more than the NSP and NSE participants was IC. The NSP participants outstripped the others in using CT and CH, respectively.

A Pearson Chi-square test was run to figure out whether the three groups of participants differed significantly with regard to disagreement strategies used by them. Table 4 displays the results of the Chi-square analysis for this purpose.

Table 4. Chi-Square Results for Disagreement Strategies Used for People of Equal Status

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	15.944 ^a	8	.043
Likelihood Ratio	17.612	8	.024
Linear-by-Linear Association	9.492	1	.002
N of Valid Cases	178		

As depicted in Table 4, there was a statistically significant association between the participants' group (NSP, EFLL, and NSE) and the type of strategy preferred by the respondents to show disagreement with people of equal status, ($\chi^2(8) = 15.944, p < .05$).

In other words, the differences among the frequencies of different disagreement strategies used by the native speakers of Persian, the EFL learners, and the native speakers of English were statistically significant.

Strategies Used for Lower Status

Table 5 shows the frequencies obtained for different disagreement strategies used by the three groups of participants to express disagreement with People of lower status (i.e. i.e. disagreeing with a younger sister).

Table 5. Cross Tabulation Results for Disagreement Strategies Used for People of Lower Status

		Type of disagreement					Total Valid Responses	
		IC	CH	CT	CC	CT & CC		
Participants' groups	NSP	Count	9	2	8	8	2	29
		% within groups	31.0%	6.9%	27.6%	27.6%	6.9%	100.0%
	EFL	Count	2	2	12	10	4	30
		% within groups	6.7%	6.7%	40.0%	33.3%	13.3%	100.0%
	NSE	Count	6	1	4	14	5	30
		% within groups	20.0%	3.3%	13.3%	46.7%	16.7%	100.0%
Total	Count	17	5	24	32	11	89	
	% within groups	19.1%	5.6%	27.0%	36.0%	12.4%	100.0%	

As could be noticed in Table 5, the differences in using each type of disagreement strategy by the three groups of participants were not conspicuous. The largest differences between the three groups were found in CT and IC, while the smallest between-group differences were those of CH. According to the above table, CC was the strategy used most frequently by the NSE (46.7%), whereas CT was used most frequently by EFL (40%). The NSP participants used CC and CT strategies identically (27.6% for both). The least frequently used strategy by the three groups of participants was CH (5.6%) in total. Figure 3 shows the results graphically.

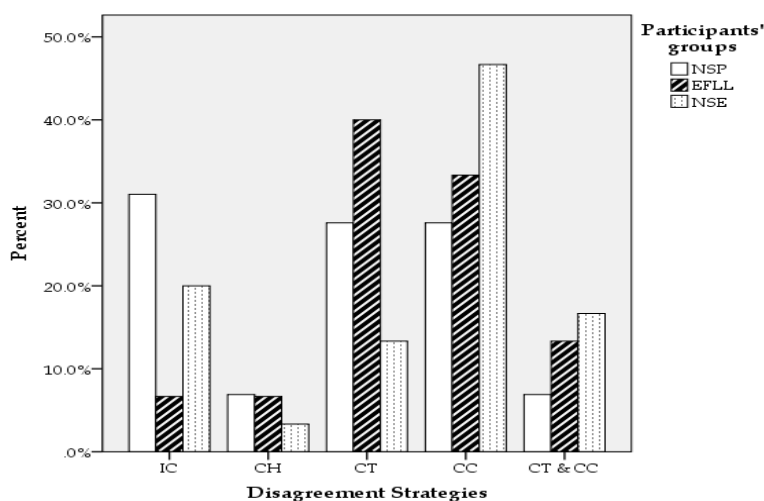


Figure 3. Disagreement Strategies Used by the Three Study Groups for People of Lower Status

Taking a long hard look at Figure 3, it could be included that to express disagreement with people of lower status, the NSP members used IC more than the EFL and NSE. On the other hand, EFL tended to use CT more than their NSP and NSE counterparts. Finally, NSE showed greater proclivity to use CT as well as CT & CC vis-à-vis the participants in the NSP and EFL groups.

Table 6 below shows the results of Chi-square test to determine whether the differences among the three groups of respondents in terms of the different disagreement strategies they used were of statistical significance or not.

Table 6. Chi-Square Results for Disagreement Strategies Used for People of Lower Status

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	11.740 ^a	8	.163
Likelihood Ratio	12.541	8	.129
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.612	1	.057
N of Valid Cases	89		

As depicted in Table 6, there was not a statistically significant association between the participants' groups (NSP, EFL, and NSE) and the type of strategy Preferred by them to express disagreement with a person of lower status, ($\chi^2 (8) = 11.740, p >.05$). Consequently, the conclusion would be that the differences among NSP, EFL, and NSE in terms of the distribution of using different disagreement strategies could not reach statistical significance.

DISCUSSION

To ascertain the similarities and differences between native speakers of Persian, Iranian EFL learners, and native speakers of English regarding disagreement strategies used for people of higher status, the researcher compared the responses of the three groups of participants to the scenarios manifested disagreement with people of higher status. Based on the results of running appropriate inferential statistic (Chi-Square test), it was revealed that the participants of the three study groups shared significantly similar preferences in using disagreement strategies. Nevertheless, the results of more detailed descriptive analysis indicated that the NSP participants used *Contradictions* more than the EFL learners and NSE participants; however, the NSE participants used higher degree of *Counterclaims* and *Contradictions followed by Counterclaims*. That is, the Native English speakers participated in the study were more concerned with saving their interlocutors' positive face as well as trying to be more indirect or be more polite in terms of social relationships while disagreeing with people of higher status using more than their EFL and NSP counterparts.

The findings can be justified partially by the fact that in terms of the influence of the social variables, as far as social dominance is concerned, the ESL learners displayed closer performance to the native speakers. But when it comes to an EFL context, some

differences were observed between the types of disagreement strategy applied by the native speakers and Iranian EFL learners. It seems that the EFL learners had not acquired sufficient socio-pragmatic knowledge to be able to display the proper social behavior (Rose & Kasper, 2001). That is, they were not sensitive to social power. L2 learners may have access to the same range of speech acts and realizations as do native speakers, but they differ from native speakers in the strategies they choose.

More importantly, L2 learners must be aware of an L2 socio-cultural constraint on speech acts in order to be pragmatically competent. Following Rose and Kasper (2001), the claim advanced here is that although highly context-sensitive in selecting pragmatic strategies in their own language, L2 learners may under differentiate such context variables as social distance and social power in an L2. So, in line with the findings of other inter-language studies (e.g. Byon, 2004; Rue, Zhang, & Shin, 2007), in the present experiment, the EFL learners appeared to develop a greater sensitivity to the use of more polite strategies in disagreement than what was seen in the native speakers of Persian, however, not close enough to comply to the norms of Native speakers of English. This study also supports Ellis's (1994) view that even advanced L2 learners do not acquire fully native-like ways of disagreeing with the other party.

In another phase, the second research question delved into the existence of any significant differences between native speakers of Persian, Iranian EFL learners, and native speakers of English regarding disagreement strategies used for people of equal status. Similar to the analysis conducted to answer the first research question, the responses given by the NSP, EFL, and NSE to the scenarios simulating situations to express disagreement with people of equal status were evaluated. The results of running inferential statistics showed that the participants of the three groups used disagreement strategies significantly different. Furthermore, the descriptive analysis's results showed that the native speakers of English had the tendency to use more *Counterclaims* or *Contradictions followed by Counterclaims* in such situations, showing a tendency to use more indirect and face saving disagreement strategies. *Counterclaims* was the most frequently used strategy by Native speakers of English suggesting that with the use of counterclaims, the speakers proposed an alternative claim that did not directly contradict or challenge other's claim. Contrary to the English native speakers, the native speakers of Persian showed an inclination to disagree with a person of equal status more often by using *Challenges* and *Contradictions*, which can be considered as more direct and face-threatening way of disagreeing with someone. Besides, Iranian EFL learners used *Irrelevancy claims* more often compared to the NSP and NSE participants.

The strategies of avoiding explicit disagreement can indicate indirectness and being polite in the speech act of disagreement. More importantly, even in the high proficiency levels, EFL learners fail to act out different function of speech appropriately. So, EFL learners must be aware of foreign language pragmatic rules and socio-cultural constraints on speech acts as well as grammatical rules in order to have successful

communication. Schmidt (1993) suggested if an English language learner is to acquire pragmatics; he/she needs to take into account linguistic functions and the context.

The possible explanation for such results can be explained by noting the fact that, as predicted by *politeness theory* (Brown & Levinson, 1987), power relationship, social and psychological distance, and degree of imposition constrain communicative actions universally, but L2 learners' assessment of the values of these universal context factors varies substantively from context to context as well as across speech communities. Therefore, it can be claimed that a strong indication that instructional intervention may be facilitative to, or even necessary for, the acquisition of L2 pragmatic ability. The findings are also in line with Niroomand (2012) and Bavarsad et al. (2015) that achieved almost the same findings.

Finally, the last research question concerned whether there are any significant differences between native speakers of Persian, Iranian EFL learners, and native speakers of English regarding disagreement strategies used for people of lower status. To this end, the responses given to the scenario representing a situation of disagreeing with a person of lower status were analyzed meticulously. According to the results of the analysis, the researcher came up with a significantly similar pattern of using disagreement strategies by the three study groups when confronting the lower status. It could be easily noticed that in disagreeing with people of lower social status, the NSE participants showed greater tendency towards using *Counterclaims* and *Contradictions* followed by *Counterclaims* compared to the participants in the NSP and EFL groups. However, the EFL learners were found to be using more *Contradiction* strategy than their NSP and NSE counterparts. In the same vein, the native speakers of Persian applied *Irrelevancy claims* more often compared to EFL learners and NSE subjects.

The rationale for the findings may be explained considering the fact that the application of disagreement strategies has been determined culturally for a long time (Bavarsad et al., 2015; Bavarsad & Simin, 2015; Norouzi, 2015; Sofwan & Suwignyo, 2011). Therefore, the three group of participants in this study chose the strategies which would fit their cultural elements best. The results of the EFL learners, on the other hand, can be considered as a combination of both cultures due to their exposure to different social backgrounds simultaneously.

Generally, the findings of this study is in accordance with Parvaresh and Eslami (2009) in the need to improve our understanding of pragmatic development in speech act realization and the nature of the strategies in order to enable L2 researchers to incorporate effective methods of teaching pragmatics in EFL classrooms. Also in line with Brown and Levinson (1987), it was found "although politeness is a universal concept, at least its realization will vary from culture to culture" (p. 265). Iranians sometimes can play a very important role to show conservative behaviors while disagreeing with different people in varying social status. They can also employ the patterns which may be absent in other cultures but are all mitigating strategies which show the faces of interlocutors are so important to be saved when there is an

opposition. However, as the results revealed, Iranians are not that conservative in using disagreement strategies when it comes to someone with a lower social status.

CONCLUSION

The results of the current study proved that Native English speakers and Persian EFL learners use different patterns of strategies while expressing their disagreement with people of different status in terms of social power. Based on the findings, while the Persian native speakers used direct contradictions more than the EFL learners and English native speakers participated in the current study, the English native speakers used counterclaims and contradictions followed by counterclaims more than their EFL and Persian native counterparts. The mentioned variation between the three groups of participants, however, acquired statistical significance only regarding people of equal status.

Theoretically, this study yields findings compatible with the claims that language learning is culturally bound and such awareness can play crucial roles in learning a new language (Ellis, 2001; Flavell, 1979; Hulstijn, 2003). In addition, from the pedagogical point of view, the results of this study endorse the idea claimed by Brown and Levinson (1987) the L2 learners' cultural awareness can be very valuable to our understanding of interactions difficulties. It is hoped that, the insights provided in this study will be of use to the EFL teachers in understanding their students' language behavior and in revealing specific differences in the choice of certain politeness strategies that may need to raise learners' awareness of these differences. Therefore, there is a need for explicit instruction of the speech act of disagreement and politeness strategies in the classroom.

Moreover, based on what was revealed in the current study, it could be suggested that EFL learners should make an effort to enhance their cultural knowledge in different aspects and in disagreement strategies in particular. They would also be encouraged to orchestrate their strategy use and extend what they learnt through the instruction out of class contexts. Applying native-like disagreement strategies is also very important for non-native learners, for without the due practice, their communication ability will be incomplete.

To provide supplementary support to the findings of the current study, further path of research needs to be paved by carrying out more warranting empirical exploration for different ways of helping EFL learners develop plausible native-like competence, including richer and more continuous techniques and strategies for the augmentation of their knowledge in disagreeing appropriately in different situations.

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APPENDIX

The English Version of the DCT Utilized in the Study

Five scenarios are described below in which you are expected to **disagree** with the speaker on different occasions. How would you respond? Please write out what you are to SAY in real life scenarios.

1. Your supervisor questions the originality of the term paper you submit. S/he says to you, "I'm sorry, but I don't think these ideas are yours." However, they are yours. In response, you will say, ...
2. You work in a company. Your boss presents you with a plan for reorganization of the department that you are certain will not work. Your boss says isn't it a great plan? In response, you will say, ...
3. Your friend makes the following comment on your thesis, "I think you should supply more data to support your arguments. You know, your conclusion is a little bit weak." However, you think that there has been enough evidence and the problem is how to give a better explanation of the data. In response, you will say, ...
4. In a seminar class on the effect of modern technology, one of your classmates says, "The so-called modern technology is endangering the environment. It causes too much pollution". However, you believe such problems are only temporary and can be solved gradually. In response, you will say:
5. You are watching the movie Titanic with your younger sister at home. When the ship is about to sink and the first mate calls out, "Women and children first" to get on the lifeboat, your sister suddenly blurts out, "It's really unfair and prejudiced to women: we're no weaker than men. Why should women instead of men go first with the children? "In your opinion, women are, physically speaking, not as strong as men. Your response will be: ...