How Iranian EFL Learners, Persian Native Speakers, and English Native Speakers Attempt to Manage Rapport in Service Encounters*

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the cross-cultural similarities and differences in the use of rapport management strategies (rapport enhancement, rapport maintenance, rapport neglect, and rapport challenge) in the complaints during service encounters based on Spencer Oatey's (2008) model. To this end, 90 participants (30 Persian native speakers, 30 Iranian EFL (English as a foreign language) learners, and 30 English speakers) were asked to complete a role-play Discourse Completion Task in four different situations. The study argues that: (1) the use of rapport management strategies is universal; all the groups used all kinds of rapport management strategies; (2) the use of rapport management strategies is culture-specific; the participants in each group differently used the intended strategies; and (3) the socio-pragmatic competence of EFL learners is sometimes different from that of the native speakers of English; it goes through developmental stages and is influenced by L1 norms. The study concludes that teachers should condition the communicative tasks used inside the class with factors such as the relationship among the interlocutors to help EFL learners develop a pragmatic competence comparable to that of the native speakers. Teachers can also resort to modern technologies to provide EFL learners with the opportunity to communicate with native speakers and receive feedback with regard to the cultural appropriacy of the forms produced.

Introduction

The emergence of the concept of communicative competence marked a shift in language teaching and learning from a biased focus on language form to language use and its social aspects (Bella, 2012; Kecskes, Sanders, & Pomerantz, 2018; Yu, 2011). According to these scholars, language competence has two major parts, namely language knowledge or grammatical competence and language use or pragmatic competence. To be considered proficient in a language, one must, therefore, possess both grammatical and pragmatic competence. Grammatical competence mostly focuses on the correctness of the speakers' utterances based on the grammatical rules. Pragmatic competence, on the other hand, goes a little beyond and focuses on how well a person can use the language to achieve the communicative goals or to understand the intended meaning. A language learner having a good body of grammar and vocabulary may not be able to communicative effectively or may be considered rude due to difficulties with conveying the massage because of his/her inadequacies in pragmatic competence (Kim, 2014; Kecskes, Sanders, & Pomerantz, 2018; Tanck, 2002). Therefore, to judge a specific utterance, we should not only consider its grammaticality but also its feasibility and appropriateness in the social context assumed. Pragmatic competence, consequently, encompasses learning the socio-cultural rules that help language learners produce utterances that are socially and culturally acceptable (Chang, 2011).

Pragmatics is also a branch of linguistics that studies the relation between language and its encoding in context. A subcategory of pragmatics is speech act theory first introduced by Austin (1962) in his book "How to do things by words". The tenet behind the speech act theory is that the minimal unit of human communication is the performance of certain kinds of acts or functions. When we use language to achieve a communicative goal, we, consequently, perform some acts (Searl, 1971) which must be performed based on the socio-cultural rules surrounding the context in which they are produced to be considered normal and natural. Gass and Neu (1996) and Chang (2011) believe that to perform a speech act satisfactorily one must possess two

sets of abilities: (a) sociocultural abilities which involve the selection of speech act strategies which are appropriate in terms of the culture involved and the speakers' gender, age, social class, social distance, etc. and (b) sociolinguistic abilities which refer to the selection of appropriate linguistic forms to express those strategies.

Therefore, language use involves the use and the observation of the related social norms which also determine the appropriateness of speech acts (Chang, 2011). Unfortunately, due to lack of familiarity with the norms governing the appropriateness of speech acts in the target language, language learners may resort to the socio-cultural rules of their mother tongues when using the target language (Ahmadian & Vahid Dastjerdi, 2010; Kim, 2014; Yazdani, Allami, & Samimi, 2014); this may lead to the production of pragmatically inappropriate forms that can expose language learners to other speakers' judgments as being rude, uncooperative, and insulting (Al-Amar, 2000). Some speech acts such as the speech act of complaint are considered to be face-threatening because they may breach the comity and harmony existing between the speaker and the listener if they are not produced appropriately (Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993).

Experts in the area of language learning and teaching should, consequently, consider the issue of pragmatic competence and appropriateness of speech acts more seriously and think of the ways through which pragmatic competence can be obtained systematically (Novick, 2000; Tanck, 2002). It, however, entails doing research studies to gain enough information about the transfer of L1 norms and the deviations of L2 socio-pragmatic rules on the part of language learners while using the target language. The results of such studies can help experts in the field to create better tasks and opportunities for language learners to better grasp the differences between L1 and L2 and, consequently, use the norms and the rules governing L2 more appropriately (Kim, 2014; Ishihara, 2006).

There have been numerous studies on different types of speech acts. These studies are, however, done based on the principles suggested by Leech (1983) and/or Brown and Levinson (1987). The fundamental

difference between this study and the previous ones is that, the present study, which to the authors' best of knowledge is the only study in this regard, draws on Spencer Oatey's (2008) framework of interpersonal relations. Helen Spencer Oatey's framework views interpersonal relations by going beyond linguistic strategies as a response to face threatening acts and reflects how social relations are constructed, maintained, and threatened through interaction.

Review of the literature

Politeness theory

Brown and Levinson (1987) proposed a face saving concept for politeness, which has widely been used by researchers in the literature. In their theory, Brown and Levinson (1987) posited a Model Person (MP) who in achieving his goals needs to choose strategies that do not threaten other people's face. Their model, therefore, involves face-work in which two types of face are assumed, namely positive face and negative face. Positive face is the desire of a person that their wants be approved and appreciated in the social interactions. Negative face, on the other hand, is the desire of a person not to be imposed on in social interactions (Watts, 2003). Brown and Levinson (1987) believed that some speech acts such as the speech act of complaint are face-threatening in nature because they can influence the speaker or the hearer's face and harm the social interactions. To maintain social interactions, MP, therefore, needs to avoid face-threatening acts entirely or to use linguistic strategies to soften them. These strategies can either enhance the hearer's face or to encroach his freedom of imposition. These strategies are selected based on "power, social distance and strength of imposition of the action to be carried out or the evaluation to be accepted by the addressee" (Watts, 2003, p. 88). Indeed Partington (2006) argues that:

> The greater the social distance between the interlocutors (e.g., if they know each other very little), the more politeness is generally expected. The greater the (perceived) relative power of hearer over speaker, the more politeness is recommended. The heavier the imposition made on the hearer (the more of their time required, or the greater the

favor requested), the more politeness will generally have to be used. (p.88)

However, scholars such as Matsumoto (1988) and Gu (1998) have leveled their criticism against Brown and Levinson's (1987) model of face work. These scholars argue that this model has ignored the social perspective of face and has overemphasized the notions of freedom and autonomy. In fact, Gu (1998) questions the universality of the notions of positive and negative face and argues that these notions cannot be considered as basic to relationship among the people in the Japanese culture and society. What is of great importance in the Japanese context is a person's relation to others in a group and his/her acceptance by other group members. As such, in the Japanese context, "loss of face is associated with the perception by others that one has not comprehended and acknowledged the structure and hierarchy of the group" Gu (1998, p. 405). In the same fashion, Koutlaki (2002) states that Brown and Levinson's (1987) model of face work sees communication "as a minefield full of acts potentially dangerous to face" (p.1737), and argues that Persian face is characterized as public face which is opposed to the concept of face proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), which is rooted in an individual's face wants. She contends that:

> Persian face (sˇaxsiat) does not begin and end with one's individual positive or negative face wants but depends mainly on one's conformity to established norms as a result of correct socialization (tarbiat) and is conferred by society on people (p. 1755).

Taking these criticism and arguments into consideration, Spencer Oatey (2008) argued that what Brown and Levinson (1987) consider as negative face is not necessarily face concern. She proposed a modified framework for face and rapport in which instead of negative face issues, rapport management is proposed. Rapport management has three subcomponents: the management of face, the management of sociality rights and obligations, and the management of interactional goals. Indeed, Spencer Oatey (2008) defines face "as the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has

taken during a particular contact" (p. 13). Thus management of sociality rights and obligations involves the management of social expectancies, i.e. the fundamental social entitlements that a person effectively claims for him/herself in his/her interactions with others. As such, people claim a range of sociality rights and obligations for themselves and interpersonal rapport is influenced if they are not fulfilled in their interactions with others. Interactional goals, on the other hand, refer to a relational goal that a person intends to achieve in his/her interaction with others. Consequently, in Spencer Oatey's (2008) framework, face is "associated with personal/relational/social value and is concerned with people's sense of worth, dignity, reputation, competence and so on" (Spencer Oatey, 2008, p. 13). As the use of language has the potential to influence interpersonal rapport, people in different cultures may try to have conventions as what is appropriate in different contexts and try to manage their relationships with others accordingly. Consequently, many cross-cultural studies should be conducted to examine if these strategies are universal, i.e. used by the speakers of different languages, and if their use is influenced by culture-specific factors.

Previous studies on Spencer Oatey's (2008**) politeness model**
While there are numerous studies on Brown and Levinson's (1987) model of face work, there are only a few studies (Ho, 2017; Sattar, Qusay, & Farnia, 2014; Wang & Spencer Oatey, 2015; Yazdani, Allami, & Samimi, 2014) on Spencer Oatey's (2008) framework. For example, in a cross cultural study of request among Iraqi and Malay students, Sattar, Qusay, and Farnia (2014) investigated the cross cultural differences and similarities with regard to the realization of request based on Spencer Oatey's (2008) framework. A Discourse Completion Test consisting of eight situations was used to collect the data. The results found similarities among the participants in the use of mitigation devices such as apologies, compliments, and gratitude. However, Iraqis and Malays differed in their perception of the situational factors. Similarly, in a study on rapport management approach to condolence, Yazdani, Allami, and Samimi (2014) focused on the condolence giving strategies produced by Persian native

speakers and EFL learners in six different situations. A Discourse Completion Task was used to collect the data. Most of the strategies used by the participants conveyed the participant's feeling and emotional sense; therefore, it was concluded that condolence giving strategies are mainly relational. By comparing the strategies used by Persian native speakers and EFL learners, it was observed that some of the intermediate EFL learners exploited the same strategies as used in their L1.

Moreover, Wang and Spencer Oatey (2015) investigated the gains and losses of face as perceived by Chinese government officials during a three week delegation visit to the United States of America. These perspectives were obtained from the group's spontaneous discussions during regular evening meetings when they reflected on the day's events. The results showed that people can perceive group face to be of paramount importance in certain contexts, and factors such as individual behavior on behalf of a group (presenting a gift or a lecture on behalf of a delegation) and personal individual behavior (asking an awkward question) can affect both group face as well as individual face. More recently, Ho (2017) studied how hotel management responds to negative reviews. To this end, four high-end hotels based in Beijing were selected. The first 15 reviews posted under each of the five rating categories (Excellent, Very Good, Average, Poor, and Terrible) and the responses given to these reviews by the management board of these hotels were downloaded directly from TripAdvisor and analyzed qualitatively. A total of 95 reviews and thus the corresponding 95 responses formed the data of the study. It was found that hotel managers dealt with such reviews with denials of the problems mentioned in the reviews and attempts to enhance rapport with the dissatisfied customers.

Nonetheless, all previous studies about the speech act of complaint in service encounters are conducted based on Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies, focusing on the content and linguistic form of the message and thus neglecting the interpersonal relation and rapport management between the interlocutors, as assumed within Spencer Oatey's (2008) framework. This study is, therefore, an attempt to focus

on the speech act of complaining in service encounter situations based on her framework.

Research questions

The present study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do Persian native speakers manage rapport while complaining about the services received?

2. How do English native speakers manage rapport while complaining about the services received?

3. How do Iranian EFL learners manage rapport while complaining about the services received?

4. What are the similarities and/or differences between the three groups in the way they manage rapport in service encounters?

Method

Participants

90 participants were asked to take part in the present study: 30 Iranian native speakers (15 men/ 15 women), 30 English native speakers (15 men/ 15 women), and 30 Iranian EFL learners (15 men/15 women). For generalizability purposes, half of the population were females, however, gender differences was not one of the goals of this study. The age of the participants ranged from 19 to 30 years old. The participants gave their consent to participate in this study and were all familiar with the service encounters used.

The Persian native speakers were undergraduate students in the fields of Humanities and Engineering at the University of Isfahan. Their mother tongue was Persian, and based on their responses to the demographic questionnaires, they were not proficient in any foreign languages such as English. The Iranian EFL learners were also the senior undergraduate students in the fields of English translation and English literature at the University of Isfahan. Their mother tongue was Persian, and they had the experience of learning English for at least 9 years through English institutes and university. They were highly proficient in English based on their achievement scores on English courses such as Conversation 1 and 2 and based on their instructors'

evaluation. The native English speakers were, however, selected from the tourists visiting Isfahan city. They were mostly graduate and post-graduate students majoring in Humanities, Linguistics, and Engineering at universities in different parts of the world. To check whether they were native speakers of English, at first, the tourists were interviewed and those whose mother tongue was English were asked to participate in the study. Some of these tourists were even English teachers in France, Australia, and Germany.

The role-play Discourse Completion Task
Although Discourse Completion Tasks seemed to be the most efficient data elicitation tool for collecting a big number of responses in short time (Cahuana, 2015), this instrument has recently been criticized due to its deficiency in eliciting authentic socio-pragmatic expressions that can be elicited through other instruments such as role-play Discourse Completion Tasks (DCT). Role-plays involve a more similar representation of a natural setting where performance is more authentic. As such, role-play DCTs were used in the present study to elicit rapport management strategies, namely rapport enhancement, rapport maintenance, rapport neglect, and rapport challenge from the three groups of the participants. As we needed to collect the most near-natural data in a very short time in this study, written role-play DCTs taking place in four different service encounters (at a telephone shop, a hotel, a restaurant, and a TV shop) were used. Each of these situations consisted of conversations between a service provider and a customer on a specific problem in services and/or products (see Appendix 1). Each situation required the participants to express their complaints as a customer in response to a given service provider. In each situation, two interlocutors (a customer and a service provider) were involved.

The data were collected from the participants in two different languages, namely Persian for the Persian native speakers and English for the Iranian EFL learners and English native speakers. At first, the situations were explained to the participants and were asked to express their complaints as customers in response to the service providers in the four different situations in written form. After collecting the data, the researchers analyzed and codified them to identify the rapport

management strategies used in the complaints. Table 1 represents the coding procedures along with some examples.

	Strategies	Examples
1	Rapport enhancement: a desire to strengthen harmonious relations in order to enhance the face, respect the sociality rights and obligations, and focus on the interactional goal.	Ok, thank you. I'm sorry. *bale, kheili mamnoon, lotf mikonin*
2	Rapport maintenance: a desire to maintain harmonious relations in order to maintain the face, consider the sociality rights and obligations, and focus on the interactional goal.	Please solve my problem. *masalei nist, agar dorost shvad hazineh ro pardakht mikonam*
3	Rapport neglect: a lack of concern in the quality of relations to degrade the face, neglect the sociality rights and obligations, and focus on the transactional goal.	It's expensive. *ghazayetan keifiat matlob nadarad*
4	Rapport challenge: a desire to challenge the harmony of the relationship. People's desire is to worsen the rapport between them, deliberately causing people to lose face, violate the sociality rights and obligations, and focus regularly on transactional goal.	You Damn thieves. *haromet bashe*

Table 1 Rapport management strategies and the coding procedure

Results

The purpose of the present study was to see how the three groups of the participants manage rapport in service encounters and if there are any differences between the three groups in the use of rapport management strategies. To do so, the data were analyzed and the strategies were codified and counted. Table 2 represents the descriptive statistics of the rapport management strategies used by the three groups of the participants.

Rapport management strategies	English native speakers		Persian native speakers		Iranian EFL learners	
	frequency	percent	frequency	percent	frequency	percent
enhancement	111	11.2	173	18.2	67	6.7
maintenance	605	61	424	44.7	565	56.7
neglect	259	26.1	272	28.7	269	27
challenge	17	1.7	79	8.3	96	9.6
Total	992	100	948		997	

Table 2 Descriptive statistics of the rapport management strategies

The purpose of research question number one was to examine the use of rapport management strategies by the Persian native speakers in service encounters based on Spencer Oatey's (2008) framework. To answer this question, chi-square was used. The results of statistical analysis (Table 3) showed that there were significant differences in the use of the rapport management strategies, namely rapport enhancement, rapport maintenance, rapport challenge, and rapport neglect ($x2= 275.333$, df = 3, $p < .05$) by the Persian native speakers. The results of statistical analysis showed that the Persian native speakers used rapport maintenance strategy more frequently than rapport enhancement strategy; rapport maintenance and rapport enhancement strategies more frequently than rapport neglect strategy; and rapport maintenance, rapport enhancement, and rapport neglect strategies more frequently than rapport challenge strategy. Hence, based on these results, it can be stated that the Persian native speakers tended to maintain and enhance their relation with the service provider rather than neglecting his/her sociality rights and obligations and challenging the relation.

Rapport management strategies	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
enhancement	173	237	- 64.0
maintenance	424	237	187.0
neglect	272	237	35.0
challenge	79	237	- 158.0
Total	948		
Chi-Square	275.333		
df	3		
Sig.	.000		

Table 3 Differences in the use of rapport management strategies by the Persian native speakers

The purpose of the second research question was to examine the rapport management strategies used by the English native speakers while complaining about the services received. The results of chi-square tests (Table 4) showed that there was a significant difference in the use of rapport management strategies by the English native speakers ($x2 =805 .242$, df $=3$, *p* <.05). The results of statistical analysis showed that the English native speakers similar to the Persian native speakers used rapport maintenance strategy more frequently than rapport enhancement strategy; rapport maintenance and rapport enhancement strategies more frequently than rapport neglect strategies; and rapport maintenance, rapport enhancement, and rapport neglect strategies more frequently than rapport challenge strategy. Similarly, based on these results, it can be stated that the English native speakers tended to maintain and enhance their relation with the service provider rather than neglecting his/her sociality rights and obligations and challenging the relation.

Question number three, on the other hand, examined the use of rapport management strategies by the Iranian EFL learners. The frequency and test statistics are shown in Table 5. The results of chi-square analysis showed that there was a significant difference in the use of rapport management strategies by the Iranian EFL learners in

complaints during the service encounters (x2 = 629.042, df = 3, $p <$ .05). The results showed that, unlike the previous groups, the Iranian EFL learners used rapport maintenance strategy more frequently than rapport neglect strategy; rapport maintenance and rapport neglect strategies more frequently than rapport challenge strategy; and rapport maintenance, rapport neglect, and rapport challenge strategies more frequently than rapport enhancement strategy. Based on these results, it can be stated that the Iranian EFL learners mostly tended to maintain their relation with the service provider. Moreover, in some cases, they even preferred to neglect the service provider's sociality rights and obligations and to challenge the relation rather than enhancing it.

Rapport management strategies	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
enhancement	111	248	- 137.0
maintenance	605	248	357.0
neglect	259	248	11.0
challenge	17	248	- 231.0
Total	992		
Chi-Square	805.242		
df	3		
Sig.	.000		

Table 4 Differences in the use of rapport management strategies by the English native speakers

Rapport management strategies	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
enhancement	67	249.3	- 182.3
maintenance	565	249.3	315.8
neglect	269	249.3	19.8
challenge	96	249.3	-153.3
Total	997		
Chi-Square	629.042		
df	3		
Sig.	.000		

Table 5 Differences in the use of rapport management strategies by the Iranian EFL learners

Finally, question number four asked if there were any differences between the socio-pragmatic competence of the Iranian EFL learners and that of the English native speakers with regard to the use of rapport management strategies in complaining about the services received. To answer this question, two sets of chi-square tests were used to first compare the Persian and English native speakers and second the English native speakers and the Iranian EFL learners. This would allow us to determine the possible differences and similarities between the groups and also to examine if the Iranian EFL learners were drawing up on their Persian socio-pragmatic competence. The results are shown in Table 6.

Groups	Strategies			
	enhancement	maintenance	neglect	challenge
English native speakers	111	605	259	17
Persian native speakers	173	624	272	79
Chi-square	13.535	31.838	0.318	40.042
df	1	1	1	1
Sig.	.000	.000	.573	.000

Table 6 Differences between the Persian and the English native speakers in the use of rapport management strategies

As shown in Table 6, there was a significant difference between the Persian and English native speakers in the use of rapport enhancement ($x2=13.535$, df = 1, $p <.05$) and rapport maintenance strategies ($x2 = 31.838$, df = 1, $p < .05$). The results revealed that the Persian native speakers used a relatively higher frequency of rapport enhancement and rapport maintenance strategies compared to the English native speakers. Generally speaking, the Persian native speakers tended to more frequently strengthen the service provider's face, respect his/her sociality rights and obligations, and focus on the interactional goal. The majority of rapport enhancement strategy used by the Persian native speakers were expressed through compliments such as "*befarmaied*", praying such as "*doatoon mikonam*", gratitude and apologies such as "*kheili mamnon*" and "*sharmandeh*". Additionally, there was a

significant difference between the two groups in the use of rapport challenge strategies ($x2 = 40.042$, df =1, $p < .05$); the Persian native speakers used a relatively higher frequency of rapport challenge strategies. The Persian native speakers mostly expressed rapport challenge through damning expressions such as "*kharje doctor davat beshe*" threatening expressions such as : "*kerkereh maghazat ro mikesham paien*", and cursing expressions such as "*chert migi, be darak ke kar nemikoneh*". However, rapport challenge was used by the English speakers through expressions such as:

I will never buy a TV here!

You should be ashamed to sell me a TV that doesn't work.

This is very bad service!

This is really disgusting.

However, the results showed no significant difference between these two groups in the use of rapport neglect strategies ($x2 = .318$, df $= 1$, $p > .05$). Rapport neglect was expressed through expressions such as:

ama in telephone no hast.

ghzaie ke sefaresh dadam keifiat monaseb nadarad va engar napokhte ast.

na nemikham. in karetoon mano besyar narahat kard.

Return the money.

But I need a discount.

Why? I do not think it is my fault.

With regard to the differences between the English native speakers and the Iranian EFL learners, the results of chi-square tests (Table 7) showed that there was a significant difference between these two groups in the use of rapport enhancement strategies ($x2 = 10.876$, df $= 1$, $p < .05$); the English native speakers used a relatively higher frequency of rapport enhancement strategies compared with the Iranian EFL learners. This result can show that the English native speakers

tended to more frequently strengthen the service provider's face, respect his/her sociality rights and obligations, and focus on the interactional goal. Moreover, the results showed that there was a significant difference between these two groups in the use of rapport challenge strategies ($x2 = 55.230$, df = 1, $p < .05$); the Iranian EFL learners used a relatively higher frequency of rapport challenge strategy. This result is similar to the results of the comparison between the Persian and the English native speakers. As such, it can be stated that due to lack of enough socio-pragmatic competence, the Iranian EFL learners were sometimes drawing up on their Persian socio-pragmatic competence in the use of rapport challenge strategies. However, the results showed that there was no significant difference between the Iranian EFL learners and the English native speakers in the use of rapport neglect strategy ($x2 = 1.368$, df = 1, $p > .05$) and rapport maintenance strategy ($x2 = .189$, df = 1, $p > .05$) .

Groups	Strategies			
	enhancement	maintenance	neglect	challenge
English native speakers	111	605	259	17
Iranian EFL learners	67	565	269	96
Chi-square	10.876	1.368	0.189	55.230
df	1	1	1	1
Sig.	.001	.242	.663	.000

Table 7 Differences between the English native speakers and the Iranian EFL learners in the use of rapport management strategies

Discussion

Scholars in the field of interlanguage pragmatics are concerned with language learners' development of pragmatic competence and their ability to efficiently use different linguistic means to appropriately interact in different contexts. To achieve this objective, numerous cross-cultural studies should be done to find the similarities and differences between the socio-pragmatic competence of language learners and those of the speakers of the target language and the speakers of their native language in naturally occurring contexts to find

the possible causes of difficulties and transfer (Bella, 2012; Yu, 2011). One area of inquiry that has recently attracted scholars' attention is the management of rapport or social relations (Ho, 2017). While the use of politeness strategies suggested by scholars such as Brown and Levinson has received considerable attention in the literature, the concept of rapport management is still waiting for further research in different socio-cultural contexts. The present study was, therefore, an attempt to compare the use of rapport management strategies by the three groups of the participants, namely the English native speakers, the Persian native speakers, and the Iranian EFL learners.

The first notable finding of the present study was that both the Persian and English native speakers used all kinds of rapport management strategies, namely rapport enhancement, rapport maintenance, rapport challenge, and rapport neglect strategies proposed in Spencer-Oatey's (2008) framework. This result can support the claim by scholars such as Nureddeen (2008), who contends that some speech acts and some aspects of socio-pragmatic competence are universal. The second significant outcome of this study was that there were significant differences between the Persian and English native speakers in the frequency of the use of the rapport management strategies. This result concurs with the argumentation raised by scholars such as Danziger (2018), Kecskes, Sanders, and Pomerantz (2018), Kinnison (2017), Koutlaki (2002), and Labben (2017) that the use of speech acts and politeness strategies are culture-specific. For example, Kinnison (2017) argues that the concept of face is complex in China and is entangled by a person's social power and connection, dignity and integrity, and his/her façade to impress others. Koutlaki (2002), on the other hand, argues that the concept of face has two interrelated facets in Persian, namely sˇaxsiat (pride) and ehteram (honour), and an understanding of these facets manages the communication and the use of politeness strategies by the interlocutors. Honor and pride can be rendered as personality, honor, self-respect, and social standing and are influenced by the way one behaves, his/her educational background, socialization, and upbringing. She further argues that the Iranian people can be seen as belonging to a family rather than standing as individuals

and their main interest and goal in their interactions is to maintain the dignity and reputation of their family. As such, in their interactions with others, they try to behave in a way that can show they have received a good level of education, socialization, and upbringing in order to maintain the dignity and reputation of their family. The results of the present study also revealed that the Persian native speakers used rapport enhancement and rapport maintenance strategies more frequently compared to the English native speakers. The reason can be attributed to the fact that as social-respect is important to Persian speakers, they tend to respect the sociality rights and obligation of their interlocutors in order to receive the same from them. Thus they use more enhancement and maintenance strategies to do so. However, more research is needed to come up with more concrete results.

Additionally, Lee (2013) and Taleghani-Nikazm (2017) argue that the use of politeness strategies is influenced by factors such as the social distance, power, and entitlement of the speaker, and the speaker's choice of specific forms and strategies is influenced by his/her perception of these factors. In a similar fashion, Bella (2014) contends that pragmatic competence has two major parts, namely pragmalinguistc competence and siciopragmatic competence. Pragmalinguistic competence encompasses the knowledge of the specific resources that a language provides for its users in order to convey specific illocutions, while sociopragmatic competence encompasses the knowledge of social and contextual variables that can influence the choice and the appropriacy of a pragmalinguistic in that language. The reason why the Persian and English native speakers did not equally use different kinds of rapport management strategies might be because of the influence of these contextual factors. As such, based on this result it can be suggested that language teachers should try to raise the awareness of language learners about the influence of these variables by designing tasks that should be performed by taking social and contextual variables into consideration.

The last significant outcome of the study was that there was a significant difference between the English native speakers and the Iranian EFL learners in the use of rapport management strategies. The

results revealed that similar to the Persian native speakers, the Iranian EFL learners used a higher frequency of rapport challenge strategies. This result can support the idea by scholars such as Yu (2011) that L1 can exert influence on L2 communicative behaviors, and L1 socio-pragmatic competence transfers into L2 behavior. Nonetheless, the use of rapport enhancement and rapport neglect strategies by the Iranian EFL learners were neither similar to that of the Persian native speakers nor to that of the English native speakers. Kecskes, Sanders, and Pomerantz (2018) argue that all language users have two types of interactional competence, namely basic interactional competence (BIC) and applied interactional competence (AIC). BIC comprises the knowledge of how to discursively link utterances to actions. This kind of knowledge is usually acquired during the childhood based on their actions and the reactions of others. AIC, on the other hand, refers to the culture-specific knowledge about how to interact in the host culture. They further argue that language learners bring BIC with them to the interactional situations in L2, and what they need to do in order to acquire enough interactional competence is not just to learn the language, but to become familiar with the culture- and language-specific interactional routines and procedures that the natives of the language use by being involved in real-life situations and interactions with native speakers. Similarly, Bella (2012) argues that socio-pragmatic competence goes through some developmental stages in order to reach to a level which is near to that of the natives of the host language and culture. During the early stages and when language learners do not possess enough interactional capacity, language learners try to perform based on either their L1 norms or what they have at their disposal and try to form their own rules; little by little they will revise these rules based on the feedback they get. Hence it would be natural to see that L2 learners' performance is deviated from both L1 and L2 in some cases. What teachers need to do is not to be strict on language learners, but, according to Kecskes, Sanders, and Pomerantz (2018), to involve them in different interactional tasks to enable them to acquire an AIC comparable to that of the native speakers.

Despite the abovementioned positive findings, the present study had some limitations and thus further work is needed. The first limitation of the present study comes from the method of data collection, namely the role-play Discourse Completion Task (DCT). Certainly, role-play Discourse Completion Task (DCT) is a reliable method for collecting authentic data over a short period of time, but the speech that is produced in a role-play DCT is not as natural and spontaneous as real-life interactions. All the participants knew that their responses to the role-play DCTs would be collected for the purpose of the present study, and that inevitable self-awareness among the participants of the study had the potential to influence their natural performance. Future researchers can replicate this study by recording natural and spontaneous conversations. Second, the participants were not homogenized in terms of demographic variables such as their levels and fields of study and socio-economic status. Additionally, it was impossible to control the level of English proficiency of the Iranian EFL learners through a standard test. Finally, the inclusion of other reliable methods such as interviews and retrospection would enable the present researchers to come up with more concrete results.

The results of the present study have several implications for the field. First, teachers should bear in mind that just providing students with communicative tasks does not lead to the development of a pragmatic competence comparable to that of the native speakers. Rather they need to condition the face-to-face communicative tasks with variables such as the relationship among the interlocutors (e.g., friends, family members, co-workers), and induce learners to communicate with each other considering these social factors. Second, instead of heavily relying on the explicit explanation of how native speakers use English, teachers and material developers need to find ways to help their learners to develop the ability to use English in the way native speakers do. To do so, teachers should always be on the search of learners' misuse and misperception of sociocultural norms of English use. Then by helping English learners understand the pragmatic meaning of the English structures used and hence the pragmatic deviance incurred, little by little contribute to the development of their pragmatic competence.

Finally, as Ishihara (2006) states, in EFL classes, language learners usually learn L2 pragmatic norms through the observation of and by asking from their peers; this deprives EFL learners of language use activities that can provide them with the opportunity to use English within the context of the target culture and hence receive feedback based on the cultural acceptability of the forms and structures used. With the rapid development of intercultural interaction, teachers can design out-of-class activities that require learners to communicate with native speakers through new technologies such as social networking. Another suggestion is to require learners to examine the complaints by native speakers available online such as negative reviews of hotels on the website (Vásquez, 2011), and analyze them in terms of factors such as the amount of mitigation and the types and frequency of rapport management strategies used. Then they can be asked to report the results to the whole class.

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Appendix 1

Situation 1:

Imagine you have just bought a telephone and when you open it, it is broken and the shopkeeper asks for extra money to fix it.

Situation 2:

Imagine your flight is delayed about 13 hours. You ask for a room but the Front Desk Agent will give a room if you as a customer pay about 50% of the room rent. And if you don't accept to pay the fee, the Front Desk Agent asks you politely to rest in the lobby and wait for the manager.

Situation 3:

Imagine as a customer in a restaurant, your food does not have the quality it used to have, and you complain to the waiter.

Situation 4:

Imagine as a customer you return a faulty TV and the shopkeeper asks about the antenna then he promises you that their engineers will have a look at it. At the end, the shopkeeper disappoints you politely that it isn't a policy to give refunds.