

# Prediction of Iranian EFL Learners' Production of Request Speech Act and Communication Apprehension by the Big Five Personality Traits

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## Abstract

Given that students' personality traits can have a powerful role in language learning, this study sought to investigate how well L2 learners' communication apprehension and request speech act can be predicted through the components of the Big Five Personality traits (i.e., extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness). The study also examined which of these traits could be the best predictor of L2 learners' communication apprehension (CA) and request speech act. One hundred and seventy-nine Iranian EFL learners at three universities in Shiraz, Iran were recruited. To single out the participants for the study, Oxford Placement Test was employed. To identify the learners' personality traits, pragmatic competence of request speech act, and communication apprehension, the Big-Five Inventory, Discourse Completion Task, and the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24) were applied, respectively. Standard multiple regression was used, and the results showed that the Big Five personality can predict L2 learners' communication apprehension and request speech act ability. Moreover, the results evidenced that extraversion and neuroticism largely contributed to L2 learners' request speech act ability and CA, respectively. The findings offer implications for EFL teachers in helping their students increase their speech act productions and managing their communication apprehension based on their personality traits.

**Keywords:** The Big Five personality traits, Individual differences, Request speech act ability, Communication apprehension

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## INTRODUCTION

Although studies on language learning have mainly focused on the universal principles (e.g., Schumann's acculturation model, Krashen's five hypotheses, Chomsky's universal grammar, etc.) that can be used to an extensive variety of individuals and contexts, interest in the impact of individual differences (henceforth, IDs) has progressed tremendously in recent decades (Afflerbach, 2015; D'browska & Andringa, 2019; Ghorbani & Semiyari, 2020; Griffiths & Soruç 2020, 2021). These studies have underscored the important role of IDs in improving L2 language skills and sub-skills (Dörnyei, 2005; Ellis, 2015). More specifically, the interlanguage pragmatics field had witnessed studies from 1980s to 2021 on the role of IDs in learning various components of L2 pragmatic knowledge (Derakhshan & Shakki, 2021; Haji Maibodi, & Fazilatfar, 2015; Kasper & Schmidt, 1996; Rose, 2009; Taguchi, 2019). As noted by some prominent scholars, IDs and development of L2 pragmatic competence containing speech acts (e.g., requests and refusals) are closely intertwined (Bella, 2012; Bella, 2014; Roever, 2005; Rose, 2009; Sarani & Malmir, 2020; Taguchi, 2006; Taguchi, 2007). Moreover, out of the important components of IDs, personality characteristics of students is an effective element that explains how they communicate with those from their own cultural and social group as well as out-group members (Rahimi & Ahanghari, 2016). Extraversion/introversion and neuroticism, being among the main components of personality traits, are widely studied in the psychological sciences. These traits look at individuals' emotional reactions and how these personality traits affect the way people do social information processing and behave (Murphy & Weber, 2019).

Communication is generally regarded as the ultimate goal of learning a language. When it comes to language learning, there are a variety of variables that can affect the way in which an L2 learner communicates. For example, some studies have revealed that communication dispositions such as communication apprehension (CA) can influence how individuals

interact in diverse interpersonal settings, no matter what the language is or at which level students are (Shi & Brinthaupt, 2015). Moreover, it has also been corroborated that those three components of the Big Five personality traits, including extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism, affect different features of interpersonal communication. For instance, Dewaele and Furnham (2000) argued that extraverted people, due to their strong behavioral orientations, have more tendencies to get involved in social interactions and have indicated a higher level of speech rate in contrast to the introverted ones. In addition, those who are agreeable are more likely to be engaged in positive conversations (Frederick & Hofmans, 2014; Zellars & Perrew, 2001).

CA as one of the components of IDs is learners' apprehension when they interact with others, and the source of this anxiety can be their failure to communicate very complex ideas. In some cases, extreme anxiety occurs when language learning involves many exercises, trials, and errors that might embarrass them (Brown, 2000; Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Gusman, 2004). Another important factor that can result in CA is speaking in public situations. However, learners' anxiety about public speaking could be alleviated through a public lecture in class in which learners are required to perform general exercises in accordance with public speaking instructions (Dilbeck, McCroskey, Richmond, & McCroskey, 2010; Dwyer & Foss, 2002; Subekti, 2018). In addition, successful learning experiences can contribute to anxiety reduction. Recent studies (Grant, 2018, Subekti, 2019, 2020) found that language learners who are experienced in utilizing a second language are more courageous speakers than those who have disturbing experiences. Another field that is more connected with IDs such as CA is pragmatic competence.

Bardovi-Harlig (2013) stated that second language (L2) pragmatics "is the study of how-to-say-what-to-whom-when and that L2 pragmatics is the study of how learners come to know how-to-say-what-to-whom-when" (p. 68). The speech act theory has attracted special interest in second language pragmatics. Over the past 30 years, various research studies have

been conducted on the comprehension and production of speech acts (Al-Ghamdi & Alrefaee, 2020; Derakhshan & Shakki, 2021; Meier, 1995; Nguyen, 2013, 2015; Taguchi, 2019, 2021; Taguchi & Rove, 2017). Among the different types of speech acts, request has been widely studied due to its numerous applications. Several studies have recently examined learning different types of speech acts like compliments (Alemi, & Rezanejad, 2014; Félix-Brasdefer & Hasler-Barker, 2015), apologies (Alavi, Shahsavar, & Norouzi, 2020; Warga & Schölmberger, 2007), politeness (Bagheri Nevisi, & Moghadasi, 2020), and refusals (Riddiford & Holmes, 2015). However, the pertinent literature indicates that the prediction of the request speech act ability by the Big Five personality traits in L2 pragmatics has received scant attention. Moreover, very few studies have been conducted to predict CA by the Big Five personality traits (e.g., Baba Khouya, 2018; Rashidi, Yamini, & Shafiei, 2012). Therefore, since there is still a need to shed more light on these variables, particularly in the Iranian EFL context, the present study sought to investigate these connections.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Interlanguage Pragmatic Competence (ILP) and Individual Differences**

Dörnyei (2005) defined individual differences (IDs) as “dimensions of enduring personal characteristics that are assumed to apply to everybody and on which people differ by degree” (p. 4). Most research has reported the correlation between IDs and L2 competencies such as pragmatic competence which is generally a vital area of research in SLA and specifically in pragmatic studies in an EFL context (Dörnyei, 2005; Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003; Ellis, 2005; Taguchi, 2017; Taguchi & Roever, 2017). These IDs are substantial in language learning as they determine an L2 learner’s linguistic and pragmatic process and rate of achievement. Considering the multidimensional nature of pragmatics, Kasper and Rose

(2002) put emphasis on the investigation of different facets of learner characteristics in the development of L2 pragmatic knowledge. Marpaung and Widyantoro (2020) argued that IDs of learners containing personalities and strategies for language learning should be considered in the implementation of learner-centered teaching. Personality features or IDs result in differences in language use (Fast & Funder, 2008). In this respect, Beukeboom, Tanis, and Vermeulen (2013) stated that to become familiar with the effects of personality, it is necessary for L2 learners to know how personality differences can act as a mediating factor in language use. Our behavior and personality are two related elements of our being. When we try to know about a person's personality, a simple question arises: "What is he/she like?" However, answering such a question seems to be quite challenging. Your personality is actually, what makes your being. It includes one's traits and characteristics. In general, personality traits can be classified into different components in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). The Five Factor Model of Personality (Costa & McCrae, 1992b) or the "Big Five" have been termed Extraversion, Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, Neuroticism, and Openness to Experience. The model is comprised of five main facets of personality traits (Costa & McCrae, 1995). These traits are able to provide a description of an individual, regardless of a person's linguistic or cultural background, age, and ethnicity (Schmitt, Allik, McCrae, & Benet-Martínez, 2007). As McCrae and Costa (1999) put it, "the Big Five structure captures, at a broad level of abstraction, the commonalities among most of the existing systems of personality description, and provides an integrative descriptive model for personality research" (p. 45). The comprising traits in the model are consistent and coherent in different kinds of measurements such as interviews and observations. The Big Five model according to its authors is a broad scheme that can compressively describe how individuals behave and react differently, making it possible to recognize personality (Costa & McCrae, 1992a). The model is the most reliable structure among those who

are concerned with traits and personalities (Funder, 2001). Table 1 lists a detailed description of dimensions (traits) and facets of the Big Five.

**Table 1.** Dimensions and Facets of the Big Five with Their Extreme Poles

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Facet</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>+</b>
<b>Neuroticism</b>	Anxiety	Calm	Worrying
	Hostility	Even-tempered	Temperamental
	Depression	Self-satisfied	Self-pitying
	Self-consciousness	Comfortable	Self-conscious
	Impulsiveness	Emotional	Unemotional
	Vulnerability	Hardy	Vulnerable
<b>Extraversion</b>	Warmth	Reserved	Affectionate
	Gregariousness	Loner	Joiner
	Assertiveness	Quiet	Talkative
	Activity	Passive	Active
	Excitement-seeking	Sober	Fun-loving
	Positive emotions	Unfeeling	Passionate
<b>Openness to experience</b>	Fantasy	Down-to-earth	Imaginative
	Aesthetics	Uncreative	Creative
	Feelings	Conventional	Original
	Actions	Prefer routine	Prefer variety
	Ideas	Uncurious	Curious
	Values	Conservative	Liberal
<b>Agreeableness</b>	Trust	Ruthless	Soft-hearted
	Straightforwardness	Suspicious	Trusting
	Altruism	Stingy	Generous
	Compliance	Antagonistic	Acquiescent
	Modesty	Critical	Lenient
	Tendermindedness	Irritable	Good-natured
<b>Conscientiousness</b>	Competence	Negligent	Conscientious
	Order	Lazy	Hard-working
	Dutifulness	Disorganized	Well-organized
	Achievement-striving	Late	Punctual
	Self-discipline	Aimless	Ambitious
	Deliberation	Quitting	Persevering

Adapted from Costa and McCrae (1986, p. 410)

A detailed description of each component of the Big Five is presented as follows:

### **Neuroticism**

Neuroticism has a connection with anxiety, angry hostility, depression, self-consciousness, impulsiveness, vulnerability, nervousness, negative emotions, anxiety, and volatility which denote “the general tendency to experience negative effects such as fear, sadness, embarrassment, anger, guilt, and disgust” (Costa & McCrae, 1992a, p. 14).

### **Extraversion**

Extraversion is one of the key components of well-known personality models. This trait is characterized by “a keen interest in other people and external events, and venturing forth with confidence into the unknown” (Ewen, 1998, p. 289), which describes it as an interpersonal dimension.

### **Openness to Experience**

This facet is described as “individual differences in imagination, sensitivity to aesthetics, depth of feeling, preference for novelty, cognitive flexibility, and social and political values” (Sutin, 2017, p. 83). Open people have a tendency to various interests, are capable of connecting ideas in an innovative manner, while are being spurred by their curiosity to seek a variety of feelings and novel experiences.

### **Agreeableness**

The dimension is related to social harmony and cooperativeness. This trait is defined as “a superordinate summary term for a set of interrelated dispositions and characteristics manifested as differences in being likable, pleasant, and harmonious in relations with others” (Graziano & Tobin, 2017, p. 121).

The function of IDs in speech acts development has additionally been examined in a number of studies. For example, Li's study (2017) revealed that foreign language learners' aptitudes influenced the improvements in producing request-making forms in Chinese L2 under two kinds of explicit teaching (input- and output-based). Takahashi (2012, 2013) also explored the causal correlation between listening skill, motivation, and knowledge of bi-clausal request forms under an implied teaching condition. In contrast to previous research that focused only on the implications for effects of IDs on pragmatic achievement, Taguchi (2011, 2012, 2015) examined the potential impacts of IDs on pragmatic development through the explicit adoption of the complex dynamic systems theory (CDST). Studies by Taguchi have revealed that pragmatic development is idiosyncratic because these idiosyncrasies are obvious when we consider each learner in his or her context.

It seems that there has been no study so far on the prediction of request speech act ability by the Big Five personality traits, and the studies with some partial overlap will be mentioned. With respect to personality traits and the production of speech acts, a study was conducted by Taguchi (2013). Her study found that IDs factors have significant effects on pragmatic development, but the influences emerged variously in terms of appropriateness and fluency. In another study, Sarani and Malmir (2020) examined the prediction of the five most common English speech acts comprising request, apology, complaint, refusal, and complement by multiple intelligences components. Standard multiple regression analysis indicated that the power of the predictability of multiple intelligences is quite respectable. Furthermore, their study revealed that out of the four intelligences, verbal intelligence made the largest unique contribution to the learners' pragmatic knowledge of the common English speech acts. In a recent study, Derakhshan and Malmir (2021) sought to investigate the correlation between L2 aptitude and pragmatic knowledge of EFL learners on a multiple-choice discourse completion test (MDCT) including request, apology, and refusal speech acts. An analysis of multiple regression

demonstrated that all CANAL-FT (The Cognitive Ability for Novelty in Acquisition of Language as Applied to Foreign Language Test) that is used to measure L2 aptitude could have a positive bearing on improving L2 learners' pragmatic competence. The capability to understand the meanings of the text and having the aptitude for learning sentential inferences among five sections of CANAL-FT could strongly predict the L2 learners' pragmatic knowledge of speech acts. However, acquiring the language rules, comprehending the meanings of contextualized neologisms, and learning the meanings of paired associates moderately predicted EFL learners' pragmatic competence.

Another ID's factor that has a strong correlation with personality traits is communication apprehension (CA). CA is a characteristic involving a "broad-based fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated [oral] communication with another person or persons" (McCroskey, 1977, p. 78). The concept of CA has been widely attributed to the foreign language (FL) learning context. In FL contexts, it is typically believed that CA is amplified among FL learners, and it is sometimes similar to language anxiety. They are used interchangeably (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996; MacIntyre, Baker, Cle´ment, & Donovan, 2002). This characteristic is also conceptualized as a part of FL anxiety. In addition, Horwitz et al. (1986) suggested discriminating L2 learning anxiety from general trait anxiety as an aspect related to FL learning contexts. According to them, it is a distinct complex behavior, involving feelings, beliefs, and self-perceptions that emerge from the uniqueness of the language learning process, and it is also associated with classroom language learning. In FL contexts, CA is mostly related to oral communication and shows itself in difficulties that one encounters when he/she speaks and listens to the L2 (Horwitz et al., 1986). CA, as a personal response/construct in reaction to a certain context, can be seen in different contexts, and it must be regarded as a trait/state concept. Trait CA can be defined as an overall fear or anxiety experienced in various communicative contexts, while state CA refers to apprehension experienced in one context but not in others (McCroskey, 2008). Without considering

which types of CA are treated, it needs to be defined as an effective response that is internalized by a person (McCroskey & Richmond, 1982). With respect to the significant role of IDs factors, there are variations in the final achievement of L2 learners. Several studies have been conducted on the relationships between CA and other variables in EFL settings. For example, Subekti's (2020) study revealed a meaningful and moderate association between L2 learners' self-perceived communication competency (SPCC) and their CA. In a similar study, Armin and Roslin (2021) reported a significant increase in SPCC and a concurrent decrease in communication apprehension among Iranian EFL learners. According to a study by Nakamura, Nomura, and Saeki (2020), students showed more speech anxiety within actual performance in terms of higher fundamental frequency (F0). In another recent study, Babakhouya (2018) reported that individuals who are neurotic and extrovert experience more English Language Anxiety (ELA), while openness and agreeableness negatively correlate with ELA. Also, Babakhouya (2019) conducted a study on Korean and Moroccan EFL learners. His investigation indicated that open-mindedness was the strongest significant predictor of English language speaking anxiety.

In applied linguistics research, a number of studies have been carried out on the relationships between different aspects of personality traits and CA in EFL contexts. In one of the earliest studies, McCroskey, Daly, and Sorensen (1976) performed an investigation to consider whether there were any significant relationships between CA and personality variables. Their findings evidenced that CA significantly affected an individual's communication behavior. Rashidi et al. (2012) found that among affective factors, extroversion was the best predictor of oral communication apprehension (OCA). In line with this study, Jibeen, Baig, and Ahmad (2018) demonstrated that out of personality components, extroversion was negatively correlated with CA. In another study, Šafranĵ and Zivlak (2019) demonstrated that a high score in conscientiousness was suggested as being the best predictor of a high score in CA.

Review of the existing studies indicated that there are very few studies conducted on the prediction of CA by the Big Five personality traits (e.g., Baba Khouya, 2018; Rashidi et al., 2012). Moreover, due to a lack of research on the prediction of request speech act ability by the Big Five personality traits, the present study sought to expand the literature by investigating the prediction of Iranian EFL learners' request speech act ability and CA by the components of the Big Five personality traits (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness). Therefore, based on the existing gaps in the related literature, the following research questions were formulated:

1. How well do the components of the Big Five personality traits (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness) predict Iranian EFL learners' request speech act production?
2. Which of the Big Five personality traits is the best predictor of Iranian EFL learners' request speech act production?
3. How well do the components of the Big Five personality traits predict Iranian EFL learners' communication apprehension?
4. Which of the Big Five personality traits is the best predictor of Iranian EFL learners' communication apprehension?

## **METHOD**

### **Participants**

The study was accomplished at three universities in Shiraz, Iran. The universities included Islamic Azad University (n= 112), Farhangian University (n= 32), and Shiraz University (n= 35). The convenience sampling method was conducted to select the participants. They were 81 males and 98 females (all 179) ranging from 19 to 35 years old. After conducting Oxford Placement Test (OPT, 2001), those gaining intermediate

levels of language proficiency were selected. They were in the fifth, sixth, and seventh terms of English literature, English language teaching, and translation studies. One of the classes started at 8:00 a.m., and the others began at 10:00 p.m. every week.

## **Instrumentation**

### **Oxford Placement Test (OPT)**

The Oxford Placement Test (OPT, 2001) is a standardized English language proficiency test that was planned and corroborated by Oxford University and the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate. The test has two parts. Part one includes 40 items related to simple grammar, vocabulary, and three cloze tests. Part two includes more difficult grammatical and vocabulary items and consists of two cloze tests. The scores were interpreted according to the criteria given in the test manual by assigning participants to six proficiency levels: beginner, elementary, lower intermediate, upper-intermediate, advanced, and very advanced. This scale had an acceptable reliability coefficient (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .89$ ). In order to make sure about the homogeneity of the students and their English proficiency level, the OPT test was performed and based on the results, the students of the intermediate levels were selected as participants in this study.

### **The Big-Five trait taxonomy**

John and Srivastava (1999) proposed the Big Five trait taxonomy. It consists of a 44-item inventory for measuring five dimensions of personality (extraversion, neuroticism, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness). To measure each dimension, the participants need to choose 5-point Likert response options ranging from 1 'strongly disagree' to 5 'strongly agree'. This inventory included eight items on extraversion, nine on agreeableness, nine on conscientiousness, eight on neuroticism, and ten

on openness. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient was also calculated for this scale which was .81.

### **Discourse completion task (DCT)**

A written Discourse Completion Test (DCT) was also used in this study. It was developed by Tajeddin and Hosseinpour (2014) to elicit the participants' request speech acts. It is composed of 15 scenarios, 10 of which are the target request situations, and 5 of them are related to non-target situations. The request scenarios varied according to imposition and social status. However, we excluded non-target situations and involved the participants with the same 10 target request situations with a change in the order of the situations.

### **Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24)**

Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24) was applied to assess the participants' communication apprehension. This instrument had a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) in four contexts: public speaking (e.g., "my thoughts become confused and jumbled when I am giving a speech"), meeting (e.g., "communicating at meetings usually makes me uncomfortable"), group (e.g., I dislike participating in group discussion), and interpersonal contexts (e.g., "I'm afraid to speak up in conversations). The scale was first introduced by McCroskey (1982) to assess feelings about real or perceived communication. In prior research, this instrument has displayed high internal consistency, with alpha reliability estimates ranging between .93 and .97 (McCroskey, 2009; McCroskey, Beatty, Kearney, & Plax, 1985). The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of this scale was found to be .87.

## **Data Collection Procedure**

After being approved by the heads of the language departments to start collecting data, the present study researchers asked five EFL professors to devote their class time to fulfill this study. After making sure about the participants' voluntary participation, six classes were involved during five weeks at the beginning of the second semester. During the first week, the Oxford placement test was applied to measure the participants' level of English as a foreign language in the three universities mentioned above. After the results were obtained, those gaining intermediate levels of language proficiency were selected as the participants in this study. During the second week, the participants were given the Big Five Inventory to fill out, and in this way, their personality traits were measured. During the third week, a DCT was used to determine the learners' ability to produce the speech act of request. During the fourth week, the assessment of the participants' anxiety response to communication situations was carried out using the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24). It should also be mentioned that all the questionnaires were distributed at the beginning of the routine classes.

## **Data Analysis**

Taguchi's (2006) rating scale of pragmatic competence was applied in this study to rate the participants' performance on DCT. It was based on a 6-point rating scale ranging from "no performance" (0) to "excellent" (5) in each situation. According to this scale, the learners were evaluated based on appropriate and correct production of the speech acts in various specified situations. The descriptions obtained by applying the aforementioned procedure were incorporated into six rating descriptors. The researchers then asked twelve native speakers to fill out the same questionnaire, and afterward, two specialist raters rated the respondents' answers based on the feedback of the native speakers to obtain outcomes that were more reliable. Pearson correlation was later used in order to measure the interrater

reliability of the measures, and the result yielded an acceptable level of agreement for interrater reliability ( $r = .87$ ). It should also be noted that the reliability of the written DCT was previously confirmed by Takahashi (2001) and Jalilifar (2009).

The researchers then applied standard multiple regression analysis to address the research questions. In standard multiple regression, all of the components of the personality traits such as extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, etc. were entered into the equation simultaneously. It showed how well this set of personality traits can predict the participants' request speech act ability and the learners' communication apprehension (Research Questions 1 & 3). Moreover, it also revealed how much unique variance each of the personality traits describes in the request speech act ability and CA (Research Questions 2 & 4; see also Pallant, 2013, for more information on the use of standard multiple regression).

## RESULTS

As mentioned before, standard multiple regression was applied to answer the research questions. Preliminary analyses were carried out to make sure that there was no violation of the standard multiple regression assumptions of linearity, normality, and multicollinearity. All the components of the personality traits were entered into the equation simultaneously.

The Model Summary below (Table 2) shows a value (.377), under the heading R Square. After converting it to a percentage amount, (37.7 percent of the variance in request speech act ability), we see that the amount is not extremely large.

**Table 2.** Model Summary<sup>b</sup> for the Big Five Personality Traits and Request Speech act Ability

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted RSquare	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.61 <sup>a</sup>	.37	.35	.46

a. Predictors: (Constant), Openness, Neuroticism, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness  
b. Dependent Variable: Request Speech act Ability

According to Table 3 below, labelled ANOVA, the statistical significance of the findings is calculated. ANOVA tests the null hypothesis that multiple R in the population is 0. Therefore, the model presented in this study reaches acceptable statistical significance (Sig = .000;  $\rho < .05$ ).

**Table 3.** ANOVA<sup>b</sup> for the Big Five Personality Traits and Request Speech act Ability

Model		Sum of		Mean Square	F	Sig.
		Squares	Df			
1	Regression	20.72	5	4.14	19.45	.00 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	34.30	16	.21		
	Total	55.02	16			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Openness, Neuroticism, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness

b. Dependent Variable: Request Speech Act Ability

As the findings above show, the model in this study explains 37.7 percent of the variance in the request speech act ability which is not very large.

The next aim of the study was to investigate the incorporated variables which contributed more to the prediction of the request speech act ability. The finding concerning this is shown in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Coefficient<sup>a</sup> for the Big Five Personality Traits and Request Speech act Ability

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	T	
1	(Constant)	1.88	.24		7.60	.00
	Extraversion	.19	.03	.36	5.57	.00
	Agreeableness	.14	.05	.20	2.61	.01
	Conscientiousness	.03	.04	.05	.71	.47
	Neuroticism	.03	.06	.04	.52	.59
	Openness	.18	.05	.26	3.74	.00

a. Dependent Variable: Request Speech Act

In Table 4, the contribution of each of the Big Five personality traits is compared. As it shows, for “extraversion”, the greatest unique contribution to explaining the request speech act ability is made. Less contribution was seen for other variables. For example, the beta value for “Agreeableness” is .20, for “conscientiousness” it is .05, for “neuroticism” it is .04, and for “openness” it is .26. The Significance values for the variable were as follows: “extraversion” .00, “agreeableness” .01, “conscientiousness” .47, “neuroticism” .59, and “openness” .00. Therefore, as it was confirmed, the contribution that “extraversion”, “agreeableness” and “openness” made was statistically significant. According to the results, the best predictor of the participants’ request speech act ability was the independent variable “extraversion”.

The Model Summary below (Table 5) shows a value, under the heading R Square, which is .454. It means that this model explains 45.4 percent of the variance in CA which is a relatively respectable result.

**Table 5.** Model Summary<sup>b</sup> for the Big Five Personality Traits and Communication Apprehension

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.67 <sup>a</sup>	.45	.43	.48

a. Predictors: (Constant), Openness, Neuroticism, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness

b. b. Dependent Variable: Communication Apprehension

Therefore, as Table 6 shows, in order to check the statistical significance of the finding, ANOVA is used. ANOVA tests the null hypothesis that multiple R in the population is 0. Thus, the model in our study reaches statistical significance (Sig. = .000;  $p > .0005$ ).

**Table 6.** ANOVA<sup>b</sup> for the Big Five Personality Traits and Communication Apprehension

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	29.55	5	5.91	.24.90	.00 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	35.59	15	.23		
	Total	65.14	15			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Openness, Neuroticism, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness

b. Dependent Variable: Communication Apprehension

According to the results shown above, personality traits can significantly predict communication apprehension.

The next purpose of the study was to investigate the incorporated variable which contributed more to the prediction of CA. This information is given in the output box labelled Coefficients (Table 7, below).

**Table 7.** Coefficient <sup>a</sup> for the Big Five Personality Traits and Communication Apprehension

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
1	(Constant)	.78	.27		2.88	.00
	Extraversion	-.05	.06	-.07	-.92	.35
	Agreeableness	.04	.06	.05	.74	.45
	Conscientiousness	.29	.05	.37	5.50	.00
	Neuroticism	.25	.03	.42	6.57	.00
	Openness	.19	.05	.24	3.56	.00

a. Dependent Variable: Communication Apprehension

As Table 7 shows, the contribution of each of the personality traits is compared. The independent variable “neuroticism” gets the largest beta coefficient which is .42. It means that “neuroticism” makes the greatest unique contribution to explaining CA. The beta value for other variables is as follows: for “extraversion” it is -.07, for “agreeableness” it is .05, for “conscientiousness” it is .37, and for “openness” it is .24. Other beta values are slightly lower than the value for “neuroticism”, which means that they made less contribution.

The Significance values for the above variables are as follows: extraversion .35, agreeableness .45, conscientiousness .00, neuroticism .00 and openness .00. Therefore, we can conclude that “conscientiousness”, “neuroticism” and “openness” made a unique contribution to the prediction of CA which were also statistically significant. It also shows that the best predictor of the participants’ CA is “neuroticism”.

## DISCUSSION

The first and the second questions of the study were posed to determine the degree to which the components of the Big Five personality traits could predict the Iranian EFL learners' request speech act ability as well as to examine which of these traits could be the best predictor of Iranian EFL learners' request speech act ability.

According to the results, the Big Five personality traits explained 37.7 percent of the variance in the request speech act ability, confirming that the Big Five components of personality traits could significantly predict the request speech act ability of Iranian EFL learners. It seems that there has been no study so far on the prediction of request speech act ability by the Big Five personality traits. Therefore, studies with some partial overlap will be mentioned. The results of other studies (Derakhshan & Malmir, 2021; Sarani & Malmir, 2020) are in line with our findings. These studies confirmed that IDs can predict the L2 learners' pragmatic knowledge of speech acts. Moreover, these findings are partially in line with the studies of Taguchi (2013) and Wyner (2014). They reported the significant impacts of IDs factors on pragmatic development. As Tagashira, Yamato, & Isoda, (2011) suggested, L2 learning motivation as one of the IDs factors can considerably contribute to the development of pragmatic competence than authentic input.

As mentioned before, the predictability power of these traits was not very high; 37.7% is a relatively good fit indicator. It can be attributed to the context in which English is learned. As English is a foreign language in the context of Iran, one possible reason for this result may be the scant exposure of the L2 learners to English. Their lack of sufficient pragmatic competence emerged when they were assigned to answer the scenarios in the DCT. Another explanation for the findings might be the employment of DCT as the only instrument for data collection. Role play can be an alternative way. Role plays due to their simulations of social interactions are gaining ground in studies on L2 pragmatics as they were employed in 83 of the 217 studies

(Taguchi, 2019). As Taguchi and Roever (2017) contended, they can be applied to examine interaction in various settings with different components related to speakers' power and social distance as well as degrees of imposition. Based on the results, among all variables, "extraversion" made the largest unique contribution to the request speech act ability, indicating that individuals who are warm, gregarious, assertive, active, enthusiastic, and passionate have more tendency to produce request speech act. The results of this study partially support the findings of previous studies such as those of Dewaele and Furnham (2000), Griffiths and Soruç (2020), Hampson (2012), Khany and Nejad (2017), Marpaung and Widyanoro (2020), Oz (2014), and Šafranĵ and Katić (2019). They stated that it is easy for extroverted students to communicate and speak in English classes or social interactions, to work more effectively in groups, and act less thoughtfully. Therefore, these individuals are highly motivated to learn an L2. Moreover, the beta values for "agreeableness", "conscientiousness", "neuroticism", and "openness" were slightly lower, indicating that they made less contribution to L2 pragmatic knowledge of the EFL learners. In addition, the significance values for each variable showed that "extraversion", "agreeableness" and "openness" made a unique and statistically significant contribution to the prediction of request speech act ability.

The results indicated that students who are generous, good-natured, soft-hearted, helpful, and trusting have more tendency to produce speech act. They respect the feelings of others and maintain harmony with them. They also interact positively with foreigners and provide assistance for them if they need support (Costa & McCrae, 1986; Lin, 2019; MacIntyre & Charos, 1996). Moreover, the results indicated that individuals with aesthetic, imaginative, active, and liberal characteristics have less speaking anxiety, tend to communicate more, and look for opportunities to interact in an L2 (Costa & McCrae 1986; Piechurska-Kuciel, 2018). It was also found that "conscientiousness" and "neuroticism" made an insignificant contribution to the prediction of request speech act, showing that individuals

having high conscientiousness and neurotic with traits such as ambitious, cautious, dutiful, hardworking, punctual, vulnerable, impulsive, and self-conscious made a negligible contribution.

Questions 3 and 4 were formulated to determine the degree to which the components of the Big Five personality traits could predict Iranian EFL learners' CA and which of these traits could be the best predictor of Iranian EFL learners' CA. According to the results, these traits explained 45.4 percent of the variance in CA, which is a relatively respectable result. It signifies that the Big Five personality traits can significantly predict CA. Moreover, the results of this study partially confirmed McCroskey et al.'s (1976) study, which showed that CA is associated with dogmatism, external control, and anxiety. The reason for the results of this study might be that CA can be related to some personality traits included in the Big Five such as extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness. As Šafranĵ and Zivlak (2019) pointed out, conscientious people are more prone to this type of language anxiety. Moreover, people who are conscientious seem to be more worried about the impression they give to others. In addition, it is substantial for these individuals to indicate that they are hardworking, which has led to heightened apprehension.

In this study, "neuroticism" made the greatest, most significant, and unique contribution to CA, while the beta values for "extraversion", "agreeableness", "conscientiousness" and "openness" were slightly lower than the beta value for "neuroticism", showing that they made less contribution. Neuroticism predicted 42.2 percent of the participants' CA, which is a relatively good fit indicator. It signifies that neurotic students feel more CA in communication with others. A possible explanation for this might be that in psychology, some psychologists classify forms of behavior in relation to particular characteristics. For instance, "neuroticism" is considered to be connected to traits such as "anxiety" and "insecurity" (Lepri, Staiano, Shmueli, Pianesi, & Pentland, 2016, p.3). The findings are not in line with findings of Kim's (2015) study which indicated that only extraversion and openness correlated with CA. As the results indicated, in

contrast to “neuroticism”, “extraversion” made the least contribution. In our study, however, “extraversion” made a negative contribution to the prediction of CA. Therefore, an increase in CA correlates with a decrease in “extraversion”. It means that students who experience higher degrees of CA ability have lower levels of “extraversion” and vice versa. This result is in line with results of Neuliep, Chadourir, McCroskey, and Heisel’s (2000) study in which they proved that an inverse association existed between CA and extraversion. Meanwhile, a positive correlation was detected between CA and neuroticism. This result confirmed previous studies such as Dewaele and Furnham (2000), Opt and Loffredo (2000), Oya, Manalo, and Greenwood (2004), and Rashidi et al. (2012). They reported that the extravert learners had less degree of anxiety and they became more involved in the interaction. Many researchers have suggested that extrovert learners would be less inhibited in their interaction, are more likely to speak, are more likely to join groups, and are more likely to participate in conversations in and out of the classroom (Rashidi et al., 2012). In addition, our findings confirmed results of Jibeen et al. (2018). They reported the main effect of extraverted personality traits on reducing CA, suggesting that they made less contribution than other personality types (Dewaele & Furnham, 2000). This study is not in line with Šafranĵ and Zivlak’s (2019) study who found that conscientiousness is suggested being the best predictor of CA.

More importantly, cultural context might also explain the obtained results to some extent. Personality traits do not seem to function out of the specific context, especially the cultural context, in which they display themselves; a fact which seems to be often ignored by second language acquisition researchers. In other words, personality traits might be culture-specific, and the definition of any such trait might differ from one culture to another. Consequently, the theoretical or the operational definitions of the personality traits underpinning the instruments used in this study might not have been appropriate for an Iranian cultural context.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The present study first aimed at exploring how well the components of the Big Five personality traits could predict Iranian EFL Learners' request speech act ability and communication apprehension. Second, it attempted to explore which of these traits could be the best predictor of Iranian EFL learners' request speech act ability and CA. All the independent (or predictor) variables were entered into the equation at the same time, and they explained 37.7 percent of the variance in the request speech act ability and 45.4 percent of the variance in CA, which are not extremely large. In this model, out of the five independent variables, "extraversion" made the largest unique contribution to the request speech act ability as well as "neuroticism" made the largest unique contribution to CA.

The answer to the first and third research questions in the present study demonstrated that the Big Five personality traits can significantly predict request speech act ability and CA. Therefore, these results suggested that incorporating the Big Five personality traits as predictors of request speech act ability and CA into the curriculum of foreign language learners seems to be substantially beneficial for learners and teachers. This is also true for the results related to the second and fourth research questions. The results showed that among the personality traits, "extraversion" predicted request speech act and "neuroticism" predicted CA more than the other types of personality traits. Thus, in terms of the theoretical or pedagogical implications, it can be discussed that those who are extravert in their social relationship can successfully produce speech acts in daily conversations. In addition, neurotic individuals can experience more apprehension in communication than those with other types of personality traits. Based on the significance values for each variable, "extraversion", "agreeableness" and "openness" made a unique and statistically significant contribution to the prediction of the request speech act ability, and "conscientiousness", "neuroticism" and "openness" made a unique and statistically significant contribution to the prediction of CA.

The results we obtained in our study confirmed that the Big Five personality traits play a vital role in the prediction of the request speech act ability and CA. Thus, these traits can be used as the bases for the prediction of learners' development. Furthermore, the role of these traits in language learning may be influenced by cultural factors which necessitate further studies. To sum up, based on the findings, it can be concluded that the researchers can propose suitable theoretical and pedagogical implications for teaching a foreign language. Further studies are also needed to investigate whether the Big Five personality traits play an influential role in predicting the request speech act ability and CA.

The findings of the present investigation suggest some practical implications. Various personality traits of L2 learners make them acquire an L2, in particular, L2 pragmatics, differently. This study implies that L2 teachers can determine their students' personality traits that are more likely to play a significant role in L2 pragmatic development, and they can tailor their instructions and provide more influential pedagogical activities and materials to support L2 learners' pragmatic knowledge. This demonstrates that L2 teachers need to plan and implement their teaching methods for this variety of L2 learners. What is more, it is of utmost importance for L2 teachers to identify and consider neuroticism in L2 classes in order to decrease anxiety levels which can strongly affect students' L2 development. Therefore, creating a relaxing atmosphere is more likely to contribute to L2 development (Liu, 2007, 2009).

The upshot of the current investigation is the theoretical possibility that via identifying the role of each component of the personality traits, L2 teachers can have a prediction of L2 learners' acquisition trajectory regarding pragmatic knowledge in its totality and different facets of pragmatic competence. By employing the Big Five Model, L2 teachers can provide individual L2 learners with special treatments according to their personality traits, present pragmatic competence, and learning goals. In terms of teacher education, L2 teacher educators can direct pre-service EFL teachers' attention towards diversified ways of knowing and categorizing

their students' personality traits in order to implement teaching strategies that are effective for individual learners.

The results of this study may not be generalized and must be interpreted with some limitations in mind. First, the learners who participated in this study were at an intermediate level of English language proficiency. Further research can be done to replicate the study with learners at a higher or lower level of English language proficiency. Second, a convenience sampling technique was used in this study to collect data. A sampling based on randomization may yield different results. Third, the data collection instruments used in this study might not have been appropriate, especially culturally, for the Iranian context, because definitions of the traits underlying such instruments seem to be loaded with cultural bias. Finally, this study was limited to an EFL context and with EFL learners. In an ESL context and with ESL learners, the results might be different. With these limitations in mind, further studies need to be done to reach more reliable and valid results.

### **Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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