

# Request Speech Act Production Differences: A Case of Iranian EFLs and ESLs

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## Abstract

There have been a number of research concentrating on the request production of ESL/EFL and native speakers. There have been some studies investigating the production of the request speech act of EFLs and ESLs. However, no research has yet focused on the production differences of request speech act among Iranian EFLs and ESLs in terms of internal and external modification devices. First, the participants were given Oxford Placement Test (OPT) to determine their English proficiency level, and 95 learners were chosen out of 123 ESLs and EFLs to respond to the scenarios adopted from Schauer (2009). Second, the scenarios were given to the participants via email or an already-made GoogleDoc link of the scenarios. The results of the independent t-test revealed that Iranian ESLs outperformed their EFL counterparts. The results regarding the request head act and internal and external modifiers demonstrated that ESLs mostly applied conventionally indirect request strategies while EFLs mostly tended to apply direct request strategies. It was also revealed that requests produced by ESLs were more native-like with no or few grammatical mistakes and that both EFLs and ESLs utilized external modifiers more than internal modifiers. This study implies that due and sufficient attention is to be paid to EFLs since they lack sufficient exposure to L2, and such impoverished pragmatic input might result in inappropriate applications of speech acts, in general, and request speech acts, in particular.

**Keywords:** EFLs, ESLs, External modifiers, Internal modifiers, Request speech act, Production differences

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## INTRODUCTION

The process of learning a language is intricate and consists of knowing different elements. One of the constituents of learning a language is understanding how to use language properly. Moreover, language is basically used for communicative purposes. In fact, to have efficient communication in cross-culturally diverse situations, L2 learners must be able to use language appropriately in various contexts. One important factor for having efficient communication in either ESL or EFL settings is that learners must have a high level of pragmatic awareness (Bagheri Nevisi & Moghadasi, 2020; Mohammad Hosseinpur et al., 2021).

Pragmatics is one of the most important concepts in language teaching and learning. Pragmatic studies are based on the speech act theory, the cooperative principle, conversational implicature, and politeness theory. Speech act theory is one of the most researched areas in pragmatic studies. According to Austin's (1962) theory, speakers' intention for using a language is not just because they want to say something but because they want to do something. Schmidt and Richards (1980) defined speech acts as "all the things we do when we speak" (p.129). As it was mentioned, people have a purpose for communication and to achieve their purpose, they not only say something but also embed an action in their speech. Because of this reason, speech acts could not be separated from real-life conversations (Derakhshan et al., 2020).

One of the speech acts is request, and it has been abundantly investigated in the literature (e.g., Bagheri Nevisi & Afsooshin, 2020; Derakhshan & Shakki 2021; Mohammad Hosseinpur et al., 2022). Since English learners are taught how to make requests and have been exposed to such requests a lot, it is wrongly taken for granted that they already know how to apply them. However, this is not the case and in reality, second language learners mostly fail to appropriately apply these requests. EFLs and ESLs have difficulty making request speech acts despite being exposed to them in various learning contexts. There are some studies concerning

ESL/EFL learners' request strategies like that of Hashemian and Farhang-Ju (2017). However, no specific study has been conducted on production differences of request speech acts between Iranian ESLs and EFLs. Therefore, production differences in request speech act between Iranian ESLs and EFLs is an underexplored area in interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) studies that should be sufficiently and properly addressed. The present study is going to fill the above-mentioned gap. Furthermore, the study was set to compare and contrast request speech acts of Iranian EFLs and ESLs and find out the differences and similarities between these two groups of learners in terms of external and internal modification devices and whether any discernible patterns existed between the two groups in their production of speech acts.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP) and Cross-cultural Pragmatics (CCP)**

Interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) has received a lot of attention from researchers (e.g., Birjandi, & Derakhshan, 2014; Derakhshan & Eslami, 2015; Mohammad Hossseinpur & Bagheri Nevisi, 2020). It is worth mentioning that pragmatics embodies two subfields: interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) and cross-cultural pragmatics (CCP). ILP is a young and budding field and is deeply ingrained in pragmatics theory and second language pedagogy developments of the 1970s (Schauer, 2009). In order to examine how EFLs and ESLs encode and decode meaning in their second language, interlanguage pragmatics makes use of pragmatic principles, theories, and frameworks. Kasper and Rose (2002) defined ILP as being part of the study of second language use in which a second language speaker attempts to grasp and perform speech acts in a given language. This definition embodies two important dimensions: first is that language learners' pragmatic competence entails both comprehending and producing L2 speech acts. Accordingly, EFLs and ESLs should be able to produce

utterances that are considered contextually-appropriate and be cognizant of how to display linguistically-appropriate behaviors in various social settings. The second aspect emphasized by the definition attests to the fact that pragmatics competence and cultural norms are tightly connected in a second/foreign language.

Accordingly, the cultural element inherent in ILP is of paramount importance to successfully function in the process of communication. In the same vein, ILP and CCP are related in several ways. Nevertheless, CCP is mostly to do with specific aspects of language use across various cultures, and many studies have already investigated this issue (e.g. Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Liao & Bresnahan, 1996; Nelson, et al., 2002; Stevens, 1993). It can be said that both CCP and ILP deal with and address cultural norms including politeness strategies, sociolinguistic rules of speaking, and common social themes reflected in speech acts performance (Brown, 2000; Lee, 2009). Boxer (2002) stated that “cross-cultural pragmatics takes the view that individuals from two societies or communities carry out their interactions (whether spoken or written) according to their own rules or norms, often resulting in a clash in expectations and, ultimately, misperceptions about the other group” (p. 151).

Generally speaking, in cross-cultural studies, the participants have different L1 cultures, whereas in interlanguage studies participants have a common first language. Interlanguage studies are of two subcategories: cross-sectional studies and longitudinal studies. Longitudinal studies examine a particular group of learner’s development over a longer period of time, while cross-sectional studies are concerned with the comparison of the collected data from specific groups of learners based on the spent time in the L2 environment or their proficiency level in the target language (Bardovi-Harlig, 1999b; Kasper & Rose, 2002).

## **Empirical Studies**

Ueda (2006) probed into request strategies used by Japanese EFLs and how such strategies developed over time with the enhancement in the

participants' English proficiency levels. The participants of this study were divided into two groups. Intermediate-level Japanese EFLs made up the first group, and native speakers of American English constituted the second group. The results revealed that conventionally indirect request strategies were primarily applied by Japanese EFLs in their conversations.

Some studies consider request strategies applied by EFLs and native speakers. For instance, Jalilifar (2009) did research on request strategies used by Iranian EFL learners and Australian native speakers. The participants were 96 BA and MA Persian students and 10 English native speakers. The results demonstrated that professional EFLs overused indirect types of request strategies whereas the native group used request strategies more moderately. However, the low-proficient learners employed direct request strategies more than learners of other proficiency levels. The study further implied that Iranian EFL learners' sociopragmatic knowledge was not developed at an appropriate level.

Lin (2009) compared and contrasted the speech act of native speakers of English, native speakers of Chinese, and EFL Chinese learners. The participants were 60 in each group, and they were given discourse completion tasks. Lin's study was concerned about the pragmatic failure of Chinese students in making requests and compliments in intercultural communication settings. The findings revealed that both Chinese students and native speakers used conventionally indirect strategies abundantly. However, Chinese students were not able to use complex syntactic structures.

Ahangari and Shoghli (2011) examined request strategies between Canadian English native speakers and Iranian EFLs in various societal contexts. Sixteen Canadian native speakers and 27 MA Iranian students took part in the study. The cross-cultural speech act realization project (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989) was applied to analyze the data through discourse completion tasks. The results indicated that Iranian EFLs utilized indirect request strategies and that both groups mostly employed

conventionally-indirect strategies and did not apply non-conventionally indirect ones.

Najafabadi and Paramasivam (2012) delved into the use of internal and external modification devices among Iranian EFLs and American native speakers. The participants were 30 American native speakers and 90 Iranian. All the participants were given a DCT including 12 situations. Findings revealed that Iranian EFLs applied external modification devices more than internal modification devices compared to their native American counterparts. Nevertheless, higher proficient EFLs were more inclined to utilize more internal modifiers as the native Americans did.

Sattar and Farnia (2014) carried out a study with Iraqi and Malay students. Thirty Iraqi and 30 Malay university students attended the study. A discourse completion test including eight situations adopted from Rose (1994) was used. The data analysis was done according to Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) taxonomy. The findings suggested that the most frequently-used external modifiers were grounders and that there were more similarities than differences between Iraqi and Malay students.

Hashemian (2014) examined the differences between Canadian native speakers and Iranian EFLs. There were four groups of participants in the study: Iranian English learners, Iranian hotel staff, Persian NNSs, and Canadian NSs. A discourse completion test was employed and the data were analyzed according to the cross-cultural speech act realization pattern (CCSARP; BlumKulka & Olshtain, 1984). The findings indicated that EFLs preferred to apply direct strategies and that Canadians mostly applied indirect request strategies.

Aliakbari and Gheitasi (2014) examined the awareness of Iranian EFLs in terms of formality, indirectness, and politeness. Discourse completion test was given to 130 advanced English learners in Ilam city. Findings revealed that 90.5% of the participants used formal or highly formal requests, 88.5% of them applied polite requests, and 67.2% of the participants adopted indirect requests.

Tamimi Sa'd and Mohammadi (2014) conducted a study on request perspective use among Iranian EFLs. The findings demonstrated that Iranian EFLs should be more cognizant of the power dynamics in their interactions and that, they should receive instructional interventions in pragmatics.

Ebadi and Seidi (2015) investigated the request preferences of Iranian EFLs. Moreover, they tried to understand if gender and proficiency levels had any possible effects on the learners' pragmatic competence. To this end, 34 EFLs were given a Discourse Completion Test including 15 request situations and a proficiency test. The findings indicated that gender and proficiency level played a pivotal role in using request strategies and females tended to use more indirect request strategies. Furthermore, the higher the proficiency level of the participants was, the more direct request strategies they were likely to utilize.

Daskalovska et al. (2016) probed into English learners' request strategies. They used role-plays as well as discourse completion tasks as instrumentations. The participants' level of proficiency was intermediate and the analysis of the responses was done according to on Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) classification of request strategies as a point of reference. The results indicated that the participants mostly applied conventional indirect strategies in both formal and informal situations.

Yazdanfar and Bonyadi (2016) carried out a study on the request speech act used by Persian and English speakers. They observed English and Persian TV series and transcribed request utterances. Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's CCSARP was used to categorize the utterances. Results were indicative of the fact that Persian speakers were mostly inclined to use non-conventionally indirect strategies, and English speakers had a tendency to employ conventionally indirect strategies.

Alemi and Khanlarzadeh (2017) compared American and Iranian EFL teachers in the case of pragmatic criteria for rating request speech act. The results indicated that significant difference exists between native and non-native EFL teachers' rating pattern.

Hashemian and Farhang-Ju (2017) conducted a study on cross-cultural variations in request strategies applied by EFL/ESL learners in their institutions. To this end, 38 intermediate Iranian EFLs in Iran, 24 intermediate ESLs in England, and 16 British native English-speaking teachers took part in the study. To collect data, the researchers used a discourse completion test. The findings revealed that the participants preferred conventionally indirect request strategies and that their L1 had no impact on the request strategies selected by the participants.

Yassin and Abdul Rezak's (2018) research delved into request strategies applied by Yemeni and Malay in English. Moreover, this study was conducted to reveal whether social power and social distance had any possible bearing on the type of request strategy applied by the students. The researchers collected the data through a discourse completion test and analyzed the data through both Blum-Kulk et al. (1989) CCSARP and Scollon and Scollon's (1995) politeness system. Findings indicated that both Yemeni and Malay students tried to apply non-conventionally indirect request strategies, and the two groups did disregard social power and social distance while communicating with one another since they applied the same strategies for all individuals regardless of their social distance and social power.

Nugroho and Rekha (2020) explored the request production by Indonesian EFLs. Forty EFL university students took part in the study, and DCT, Role-plays, and Focus Group Discussion were used to collect data. Having analyzed the data analyzed according to CCSARP, the researchers could easily discern that Indonesian EFLs mostly used conventionally-indirect request strategies.

Majed Alshraah and Daradkeh (2021) examined the production of request speech act by Arabic native speakers who were both EFLs and ESLs (30 EFLs & 30 ESLs). The participants took a Discourse Completion Test (DST) including 12 written scenarios. The results indicated that both EFL and ESL groups tended to apply conventionally-indirect request strategies and did not display a tendency to apply direct request strategies.



Mohammad Hosseinpour et al. (2021) employed Schauer's (2009) taxonomy to delve into the requests produced by Iranian EFLs. The study compared and contrasted Written Discourse Completion Task (WDCT), Oral Discourse Completion Task, and Role-play with Natural methodology to figure out which measure approximated Natural methodology as measures of pragmatic competence. Findings demonstrated that the use of request head act, and internal and external modifiers were more salient in the WDCTs, ODCTs, and Role-plays than those in Natural methodology.

Malmir and Taji (2021) investigated the interplay of action, context, and linguistic vs. non-linguistic Resources in L2 in the case of requests and refusals. The participants (108 upper-intermediate to advanced EFL learners) were given three hundred audio-recorded conversations consisted of making request-refusal adjacency pairs. The participants mostly applied linguistic rather than nonlinguistic turn construction units.

## **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

Recent studies have explored and analyzed the production of requests by different groups of participants. Some studies concentrated on the production of requests by EFLs and others focused on ESLs. The number of participants in most of the studies was marginal which could have undermined the generalizability of findings. There have been some research concentrating on the request production of ESL, EFL, and native speakers. There have been some studies investigating the production of request speech act of EFLs and ESLs. However, no study has yet delved into the production differences of request speech acts of Iranian EFLs and ESLs. More specifically, none of the aforementioned studies have focused on production differences of request speech act among Iranian EFLs and ESLs in terms of internal and external modification devices. To achieve the above-stated objectives, the researchers formulated the following research questions:

- 1) Which group (Iranian EFL vs. Iranian ESL) outperforms the other on the request speech act DCT?

2) How are the requests produced by Iranian EFLs and ESLs different in terms of request head act, and internal and external modification devices?

## **METHOD**

### **Participants**

The participants of the study were 123 EFLs and ESLs from among whom 95 were selected and qualified based on the Oxford Placement Test. Their language proficiency level was determined based on OPT. Therefore, the study was carried out with a total number of 95 (59 EFLs and 36 ESLs) male and female Iranians aged between 15 to 60 years old learners. Both EFLs and ESLs were students or graduates of applied linguistics. EFLs were individuals who had been studying EFL in Iran for almost five years, and ESLs were Iranians who had been studying English in ESL contexts: The U.S, Australia, the U.K, and Canada for at least five years or more.

### **Instrumentations**

#### *Oxford Placement Test*

To determine the participants' language proficiency level, the researchers utilized the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) at the beginning of the study via email or an already-made Google Doc link of the test enabling the researchers to place learners into the appropriate proficiency levels. The OPT entailed three parts: Vocabulary test, reading comprehension, and structure. This test was comprised of 40 vocabulary tests, 40 grammar tests, and 20 reading comprehension tests.

#### *Request speech act scenarios*

Sixteen request speech act scenarios were borrowed from Schauer (2009) to collect data. Categorization of 16 request scenarios was done according to the two variables of 'status' and 'imposition'. There were four low

imposition and equal status, four low imposition and higher status, four high imposition and equal status, and four high imposition and higher status request scenarios. Scenario 7 'speak louder', scenario 9 'open window', scenario 12 'give directions', and scenario 14 'move away from the door' were low imposition and equal status scenarios. Scenario 1 'open window', scenario 2 'give directions', scenario 5 'move away from the door', and scenario 16 'speak louder' were low imposition and higher status. Scenario 3 'fill our questionnaire', scenario 6 'postpone something', scenario 10 'borrow something', scenario 15 'arrange a meeting' were high imposition and equal status. Scenario 4 'borrow something', scenario 8 'arrange a meeting', scenario 11 'fill out questionnaire', scenario 13 'postpone something' were high imposition and higher status.

### ***Taguchi's Rating Scale***

The first research question was answered based on Taguchi's rating scale which is comprised of a six-point rating scale to rate the participants' performances on request speech acts. Based on this rating scale, a score (0) was assigned to unanswered questions. Score (1) was allocated to very poorly-made expressions for which there was no speech act performance. Score (2) was assigned to poorly-made expressions whose suitability and properness could not be readily specified due to structural and discoursal errors. A score (3) was given to relatively appropriate expressions whose grammatical and structural inconsistencies did not thwart their actual properness. Score (4) was devoted to good expressions with very few discourse and grammatical errors. Score (5) was allocated to excellent or fully proper statements with no structural or discoursal errors. (Mohammad Hosseinpur et al., 2019). The two researchers rated the DCTs scale accordingly and ran Cronbach's Alpha Formula to initially specify and guarantee the inter-rater reliability of the two raters of the DCTs. The inter-rater reliability stood at .78 which could be considered an acceptable reliability index.

### *Schauer (2009) Taxonomy Of Request Speech Act*

Schauer (2009) categorized requests into three main subcategories: Direct, conventionally indirect, and non-conventionally indirect requests. Imperatives, performatives, want statements, and locution derivables can be regarded as the subcomponents of direct requests in which the requester's intent is precisely uttered in a statement, and the requestee can readily apprehend the illocutionary force of the request. Suggestory formula, availability, prediction, permission, willingness and ability are the included subcategories within the conventionally-indirect requests. Through conventionally-indirect strategies, the requester employs conventionalized linguistic tools to mitigate the illocutionary power of a statement. In non-conventionally indirect request strategies or hints, there is ambiguity involved in a request and therefore its interpretation cannot be achieved easily. Accordingly, the greatest amount of accountability is required on the part of the listener to attain appropriate comprehension and full understanding regarding the requests (Mohammad Hosseinpur et al., 2021).

**Table 1:** Taxonomy of Request Strategies (borrowed from Schauer 2009, 86)

<b>Direct Requests</b>	
Imperatives	Tell me the way to X!
Performatives	
Unhedged	I'm asking you to tell me the way to X!
Hedged	I want to ask you the way to X!
Want statements	I wish you'd tell me the way to X!
Locution derivable	Where is X!
<b>Conventionally Indirect Requests</b>	
Suggestory formula	How about telling me the way to X!
Availability	Have you got time to tell me the way to X!
Prediction	Is there any chance to tell me the way to X!
Permission	Could I ask you about the way to X!
Ability	Could you tell me the way to X!
<b>Non-Conventionally Indirect Requests</b>	
Hints	I have to meet someone in X!

If the modification devices are within the request, they are called internal modifiers. On the other hand, if the modification devices are in the immediate linguistic context that surrounds it, they are called external modifiers. According to Schauer's (2009) classification, internal modification devices are of two kinds: Lexical modifiers and syntactic modifiers. Lexical modifiers are politeness markers, downtoners, understaters, consultative devices, hedges, past tense modals, aspect, and marked modifiers. Syntactic modifiers are conditional clauses, tentative embeddings, appreciative embeddings, tag questions, and negations. External modifiers are further subclassified into alerters, preparators, grounders, disarmers, imposition minimizers, sweeteners, promise of reward, small talks, appreciators, and considerators (Mohammad Hosseinpur et al., 2021).

**Table 2:** Taxonomy of Internal Modifiers: Lexical Downgraders (Borrowed from Schauer 2009, 90)

Name	Function	Example
Downtoner	sentence adverbial that is applied in order to lessen the force of the request	Could I maybe have some of them or could you bring a copy or something?
Politeness Marker	used by the speakers to bid for their interlocutors' cooperation	Could you open the door a little bit, please?
Understater	adverbial modifier that is applied to decrease the imposition of the request by underrepresenting the proposition of the request	Can you speak up a bit, please?
Past Tense Modals	past tense forms like could instead of can make the request appear more polite	Professor Jones, could you tell me the way to Trent Building?
Consultative Device	used to consult the interlocutor's opinion on the proposition of the request	Erm, Lucy, would you mind opening the window?
Hedge	adverbial that is employed by the speaker to make the request more unclear	Is it possible if we can arrange a meeting during the holidays somehow?
Aspect	progressive form of verb that is applied intentionally by the speaker	I was wondering if maybe you could give fill in this questionnaire?
Marked Modality	might and may make the request appear more tentative	Excuse me, may I just pass?

**Table 3:** Taxonomy of Internal Modifiers: Syntactic Downgraders (Schauer 2009, p. 90)

Name	Function	Example
Conditional Clause	used by speakers to distance themselves from the request	I would like to ask if you could maybe pass this paper?
Appreciative Embedding	employed by the speakers to positively reinforce the request internally by stating their hopes and positive feelings	Excuse me, it would be really nice if you would fill out this, that questionnaire.
Tentative Embedding	used by the speaker to make the utterance appear less direct and to show hesitation	Sorry, Lucy, erm, I really got problems with this questionnaire and I wondered if you might find some time to help me filling it in?
Tag question	used to downtone the impact of the request by appealing to the interlocutor's consent	I don't think you could speak louder, could you?
Negation	employed by speakers to downtone the force of the request by indicating their lowered expectations of the request being met	Jack, you couldn't borrow your books, please?

**Table 4:** Taxonomy of External Modifiers (Schauer 2009, p. 92)

Name	Function	Example
Alerter	linguistic device that is used to get the interlocutor's attention; precedes the Head	Er; excuse me; hello; Pete
Preparator	short utterance that intends to prepare the interlocutor for the request; can follow or substitute the Alerter	May I ask you a favor?
Head	the actual request	Do you know where the Tate Modern is?
Grounder	provides an explanation for the request	Erm, unfortunately, I really can't hear your voice.
Disarmer	used to pre-empt the interlocutor's potential objections	I know you are really busy but maybe you could help me.
Imposition Minimizer	employed to decrease the imposition of the request	I will return them immediately, the next day.
Sweetener	employed to flatter the interlocutor and to put them into a positive mood	I believe you are the best person to do this for me.
Promise of Reward	the requester offers the interlocutor a reward for fulfilling the request	I would fill in your questionnaire if you need it one day.
Smalltalk	short utterance at the beginning of the request that is intended to establish a positive atmosphere	Nice to meet you.
Appreciator	usually employed at the end of the request to positively reinforce it	It would be really great
Considerator	employed at the end of the request; intends to show consideration towards the interlocutor's situation	Only if you've got the time of course

## **Data Collection Procedure**

First, the participants were given the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) in order to determine their English level, and 95 learners were chosen out of 123 ESL and EFL learners to respond to the scenarios. Second, the scenarios were given to the participants via email and an already-made Google Doc link of scenarios. The request speech act scenarios that were borrowed from Schauer (2009) were given to the two groups of participants i.e. Iranian EFLs and ESLs to compare and contrast their production of the request speech act. Then, their responses were gathered and thoroughly examined.

## **Coding Procedure**

Having collected all the participants' responses to scenarios, the researchers went through the responses as thoroughly as possible to code them. The coding process was achieved according to Schauer's (2009) taxonomy. To attain coding, the researchers went through ESLs and EFLs' responses one by one and decided upon the subcategory to which the provided response belonged. It turned out that the two coders almost concurred with one another in most cases; however, the two coders turned to an expert for help to make the right decision in case of discrepancies (Mohammad Hosseinpur et al., 2021).

## **Data Analysis**

Independent samples t-test was run to answer the first research question which delved into Iranian ESLs and EFLs' request speech act production differences based on Taguchi's rating scale (2006). To answer the second research question, the researchers counted the direct, conventionally-indirect, and non-conventionally indirect requests along with their speech head act, internal and external modification devices and then determined the total number of each request strategy type or modification device subcategory. Furthermore, prototype exemplars were presented for both

Iranian EFLs and ESLs from their provided responses to the sixteen scenarios borrowed from Schauer (2009).

## RESULTS

The normality of the request speech act DCT was probed by computing the ratios of skewness and kurtosis indices over their respective standard errors (Table 5). The results indicated that the ratios of skewness and kurtosis over their standard errors were lower than  $\pm 1.96$ . Thus; it was concluded that the assumption of normality was retained. It should be noted that the ratios of skewness and kurtosis are analogous to z-scores (Field 2018), which can be tested against the criteria of  $\pm 1.96$  at .05 levels of significance.

**Table 5:** Descriptive Statistics; Testing Normality of Request Act DCT

Group	Gender	N		Skewness		Kurtosis	
		Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Statistic	
EFL	Male	27	.786	EFL	Male	27	.786
	Female	32	.518		Female	32	.518
ESL	Male	12	-.262	ESL	Male	12	-.262
	Female	24	-.298		Female	24	-.298

### Exploring Question 1

The first research question delved into Iranian ESLs and EFLs' request speech act production differences based on Taguchi's (2006) rating scale. An independent-samples t-test was run to compare and contrast the two groups' means of request speech act DCT. Table 6 displays the results of the descriptive statistics for the two groups on request speech act DCT. The results indicated that the ESL group ( $M = 4.17$ ,  $SD = .737$ ) had a higher mean than the EFL group ( $M = 2.71$ ,  $SD = .892$ ) on request speech act DCT.

**Table 6:** Descriptive Statistics; Request Speech Act DCT by Groups

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
ESL	36	4.17	.737	.123
EFL	59	2.71	.892	.116



Table 7 displays the results of the independent-samples t-test. Before discussing the results, it should be noted that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was retained on request speech act DCT. As displayed in Table 7, the non-significant results of Levene's test ( $F = 1.62, p >.05$ ) indicated that the two groups were homogenous in terms of their variances on request speech act DCT. That was why the first row of Table 7, i.e. "Equal variances assumed," was reported. The results of independent samples t-test; ( $t(93) = 8.22, p <.05, r = .649$  representing a large effect size) revealed that the ESL group significantly outperformed the EFL group on request speech act DCT.

**Table 7:** Independent-Samples t-test; Receptive Request Speech Act DCT by Groups

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	1.627	.205	8.222	93	.000	1.455	.177	1.103	1.806
Equal variances not assumed			8.61084	686	.000	1.455	.169	1.119	1.791

Figure 1 displays the EFL and ESL groups' means on request speech act DCT. The ESL group ( $M = 4.17$ ) had a higher mean than the EFL group ( $M = 2.71$ ).



**Figure 1:** Means on request speech act DCT by groups

## Exploring Question 2

The second research question delved into the production differences and similarities of request speech act between Iranian EFLs and ESLs in terms of request head act, internal and external modification devices.

The following examples are some sentences produced by EFLs and ESLs extracted from the data. The researchers went through them and examined them based on Schauer's (2009) classification of request head act, internal, and external modification devices.

### *ESL examples*

- 1) Sorry professor. I was wondering if you could direct me to the Trent Building.
  - 1, External modifier (Alerter)
  2. Internal modifier (Aspect)
  3. Internal modifier (Conditional clause)
  - 4, Internal modifier (Past tense modals)

5. Request head act (Conventionally indirect request: Ability)
- 2) Hello sir. Can I ask you that how can I get to the Trent Building?
1. External modifier (Alerter)
  2. External modifier (Preparator)
  3. Request head act (Conventionally indirect request: Permission)
- 3) Hi Lucy! What's up? ... I know you are so busy these days, but I really need your help in my project. You are the best case in my study. I really appreciate if you could fill this questionnaire. I promise to help you in your projects.
1. External modifier (Alerter)
  2. External modifier (Small talk)
  3. External modifier (Disarmer)
  4. External modifier (Sweetener)
  5. Internal modifier (Appreciative embedding)
  6. Internal modifier (Conditional clause)
  7. Internal modifier (Past tense modals)
  8. Request head act (Conventionally indirect request: Ability)
  9. External modifier (Promise of reward)
- 4) Dear Lucy! I know you are so busy right now. But I was wondering if you could do me a favor and fill in my questionnaire. I would really appreciate that.
1. External modifier (Alerter)
  2. External modifier (Disarmer)
  3. Internal modifier (Tentative embedding)
  4. Internal modifier (Conditional clause)
  5. Internal modifier (Past tense modals)
  6. Request head act (Conventionally indirect request: Ability)
  7. External modifier (Appreciative embedding)

As displayed in Table 8, the ESL responses to the borrowed scenarios had 1 direct requests accounting for 2.3% of all the made requests, 40 conventionally-indirect requests accounting for 95.2% of the total

number of requests, and only one non-conventionally indirect request accounting for 2.3% of the total number of requests.

**Table 8:** ESL Request Head Act

Direct Request	Request Head Act	
	Conventionally Indirect Request	Non-Conventionally Indirect Request
1 (2.3%)	40 (95.2%)	1 (2.3%)

As shown in Table 9 and 10, the ESL responses to the borrowed scenarios in terms of internal modifiers had 1 downtoner accounting for 2.3% of all the made requests, 7 politeness markers accounting for 16.6% of all the made requests, 12 past tense modals accounting for 28.5% of the total number of requests, 6 consultative devices accounting for 14.2% of the total number of requests, 2 aspects accounting for 4.7% of the total number of requests, 3 marked modalities accounting for 7.1% of the total number of requests, 14 conditional clauses accounting for 33.3% of the total number of requests, 3 appreciative embeddings accounting for 7.1% of the total number of requests, 4 tentative embeddings accounting for 9.5% of the total number of requests, 2 intensifiers accounting for 2.7% of the total number of requests, and other types of internal modifiers were not included in participants' answers.

**Table 9:** ESL Internal Modifiers

Internal Modifiers								
Downtoner	Politeness Marker	Unders tater	Past Tense Modal	Consul tative Device	Hedge	Aspec t	Marked Modalit y	Condi tional Clause
1(2.3%)	7(16.6%)	0(0%)	12 (28.5%)	6(14.2%)	0 (0%)	2 (4.7%)	3(7.1%)	14(33.3%)

**Table 10:** (Continued)

Internal Modifiers								
Appreciative Embedding	Tentative Embedding	Tag Question	Negation	Intensifier	Time Intensifier	Time Intensifier <sup>+</sup> Intensifier	Expletive	Overstater
3 (7.1%)	4 (9.5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2(4.7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

As it is revealed in Table 11, the ESL responses to the borrowed scenarios in terms of external modifiers had 28 alerterers accounting for 66.6% of all the made requests, 5 preparators accounting for 11.9% of the total number of requests, 23 grounders accounting for 54.7% of the total number of requests, 11 disarmers accounting for 26.1% of the total number of requests, 1 imposition minimizer accounting for 2.3% of the total number of requests, 4 sweetener accounting for 9.5% of the total number of requests, 1 promise of rewards accounting for 2.3% of the total number of requests, 2 small talks accounting for 4.7% of the total number of requests, 3 appreciators accounting for 7.1% of the total number of requests, and 0 considerator accounting for 0% of the total number of requests.

**Table 11:** ESL External Modifier

External Modifiers									
Alerter	Preparator	Ground er	Disarme r	Imposition Minimizer	Sweete ner	Promise of Reward	Small Talk	Appre ciator	Conside rator
28 (66.6%)	5 (11.9%)	23 (54.7%)	11 (26.1%)	1(2.3%)	4 (9.5%)	1(2.3%)	2 (4.7%)	3 (7.1%)	0(0%)

### EFL examples

- 1) Sorry! Please open the window.
  1. External modifier (Alerter)
  2. Internal modifier (Politeness marker)
  3. Request head act (Direct: Imperative)
- 2) I beg your pardon prof! Please open the window. It's so hot.

1. External modifier (Alerter)
  2. Internal modifier (Politeness marker)
  3. Request head act (Direct: Imperative)
  4. External modifier (Grounder)
- 3) I want you to open the window, please.
1. Request head act (Direct: want statement)
  2. Internal modifier (Politeness marker)
- 4) Excuse me professor Jones! Sorry for taking your time. Could you say me how I can get to Trent Building? My next seminar is there.
1. External modifier (Alerter)
  2. External modifier (Disarmer)
  3. Internal modifier (Past tense modals)
  4. Request head act (Conventionally indirect request: Ability)
  5. External modifier (Grounder)
- 5) Pardon me! I really have tried hardly, but I couldn't find anything in fact. As you are really specialist in this area, I want to ask you if you kindly introduce some articles about this area to me. I will be really thankful and it will be a great help.
1. External modifier (Alerter)
  2. External modifier (Grounder)
  3. External modifier (Sweetener)
  4. Request head act (Direct request: Performative)
  5. Internal modifier (Conditional clause)
  6. External modifier (Appreciator)

Having thoroughly examined all the provided responses to the sixteen scenarios borrowed from Schauer (2009), the researchers first determined the request head act, internal and external modifiers of the presented responses based on the same taxonomy and then counted their overall frequencies and percentages. The results are presented in the following Tables. As shown in Table 12, the EFL responses to the borrowed scenarios had 27 direct requests accounting for 64.2% of all the made

requests, 14 conventionally-indirect requests accounting for 33.3% of the total number of requests, and only one non-conventionally indirect request accounting for 2.3% of the total number of requests.

**Table 12:** EFL Request Head Act

Request Head Act		
Direct Request	Conventionally Indirect Request	Non-Conventionally Indirect Request
27 (64.2%)	14 (33.3%)	1 (2.3%)

As displayed in Tables 13 and 14, the EFL responses to the borrowed scenarios in terms of internal modifiers had 18 politeness markers accounting for 42.8% of all the made requests, 4 past tense modals accounting for 9.5% of the total number of requests, 1 consultative device accounting for 2.3% of the total number of requests, 2 marked modalities accounting for 4.7% of the total number of requests, 2 conditional clauses accounting for 4.7% of the total number of requests, 1 tentative embedding accounting for 2.3% of the total number of requests, 1 intensifier accounting for 2.3% of the total number of requests, and other types of internal modifiers were not included in participants' answers.

**Table 13:** EFL Internal Modifiers

Internal Modifiers								
Downtoner	Politeness Marker	Understater	Past Tense Modal	Consultative Device	Hedger	Aspect	Marked Modality	Conditional Clause
0(0%)	18(42.8%)	0(0%)	4(9.5%)	1(2.3%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	2(4.7%)	2(4.7%)

**Table 14:**(Continued)

Internal Modifiers								
Appreciative Embedding	Tentative Embedding	Tag Question	Negation	Intensifier	Time Intensifier	Time Intensifier <sup>+</sup> Intensifier	Expletive	Overstater
0 (0%)	1 (2.3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1(2.3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

As revealed in Table 15, the EFL responses to the borrowed scenarios in terms of external modifiers had 29 alerters accounting for 69% of all the made requests, 5 preparators accounting for 11.9% of the total number of requests, 15 grounders accounting for 35.7% of the total number of requests, 2 disarmers accounting for 4.7% of the total number of requests, 1 sweetener accounting for 2.3% of the total number of requests, 2 small talks accounting for 4.7% of the total number of requests, 2 appreciators accounting for 4.7% of the total number of requests, 2 considerators accounting for 4.7% of the total number of requests, and other types of external modifiers were not included in participants' answers.

**Table 15:** EFL External Modifier

External Modifiers									
Alert er	Prepar ator	Groun der	Disar mer	Imposi on Minimi zer	Sweete ner	Prom ise of Rewar d	Smal l Talk	Appreci ator	Consider ator
29 (69%)	5(11.9%)	15 (35.7%)	2(4.7%)	0(0%)	1(2.3%)	0(0%)	2 (4.7%)	2(4.7%)	2(4.7%)

The results indicated that most EFLs, 64.2% of the EFLs applied direct request strategies. However, the majority of the ESLs (95.2%) tended to use conventionally indirect request strategies. In terms of internal and external modification devices, ESLs made use of internal and external modifiers more than EFLs. The EFL participants mostly used external modifiers, especially alerters, and in the case of internal modifiers they mostly applied politeness markers. On the other hand, the ESL participants mainly employed external modifiers, especially alerters and grounders, and in the case of internal modifiers, they primarily utilized conditional clauses. In sum, both ESLs and EFLs used external modifiers more than internal modifiers.

## DISCUSSION

The first question addressed whether there were not any significant differences between EFLs and ESLs in terms of request speech act



production. In order to find the difference between the performance of EFLs and ESLs on the request speech act, Taguchi's rating scale was applied, and the results revealed that the ESL group outperformed their EFL counterpart on the request speech act DCT.

One possible argument for better performance of the ESLs compared with the EFLs can be attributed to the context of living. Since ESLs live in English contexts, they are more exposed to the English language every day, and use English more than EFLs. Consequently, the environment has a positive influence and ESLs are more aware of making appropriate sentences and fair expressions with no or few grammatical mistakes. It is due to the interactions with native speakers of English not just because of great access to authentic input (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Kinginger, 2008; Schauer, 2006; Shimizu, 2009). The result of this research is in line with the findings of Schauer (2006) which investigated a study between German ESLs and two control groups of German EFLs and native speakers of English. The results revealed that ESLs had fewer grammatical errors compared with EFL participants. Another explanation for a better performance of ESLs could be motivation. ESLs are more motivated to learn a second language than EFLs (Taguchi, 2011). They are in native language culture and can be more motivated in the development of pragmatic competence compared with the EFL environment.

The second question probed into the differences between EFLs and ESLs in terms of request head act, and internal and external modification devices. In order to find the differences between EFLs and ESLs, some sentences were extracted and analyzed in a way that request head act, internal and external modifiers of each sentence were counted. As far as the results of the study are concerned, there were marked differences between EFLs and ESLs in the production of request head act, internal and external modification devices.

One possible argument for the preference of direct strategies over conventionally indirect strategies by EFLs may be the EFLs' tendency to follow their L1 patterns. ESLs are in an ESL context and therefore, L1

pragmatic transfer does not influence their request production. This is in line with the research conducted by Hashemian (2014) who probed into L1 pragmatic transfer for EFLs.

Another possible justification for the preference of direct strategies by EFLs and conventionally indirect strategies by ESLs could be ascribed to the influence of ESL culture on ESL participants. Since EFL and ESL cultures are asymmetrical, Iranian EFLs made use of direct strategies more than conventionally indirect strategies. To clarify the issue of cultural differences, the Iranian fundamental schemas can be expressed as “Persian is a language with a very simple grammatical structure and a rich set of stylistic variables that help individuals to convey accounts of their feelings. An individual has many choices in speaking that must be determined on ‘pragmatic’ grounds” (Beeman, 1986, p. 10). The results are incongruent with the findings of previous research (e.g., Hashemian & Farhang-Ju, 2017; Majed Alshraah & Daradkeh, 2021; Yassin & Abdul Rezak, 2018) in that they concluded that both EFLs and ESLs applied the same request strategy which is conventionally indirect strategies.

One probable explanation for applying external modifiers more than internal modifiers by the two groups of participants may be the fact that Iranians got used to preparing the ground for their speech in every situation. They are willing to prepare some explanations as well as additional statements before they start to talk about their main request and consequently, they tend to use external modifiers more than internal modifiers. Consider the following examples selected from EFLs and ESLs’ production of request speech act. The first example is: “Hi Lucy! What's up? ... I know you are so busy these days, but I really need your help with my project. You are the best case in my study. I really appreciate if you could fill this questionnaire. I promise to help you in your projects.” And the second example is: “Pardon me. I really have tried hardly, but I couldn't find anything in fact. As you are really specialist in this area, I want to ask you if you kindly introduce some articles about this area to me. I will be really thankful and it will be a great help.” In the first example which is produced

by an ESL, there are five external modifiers and three internal modifiers. In the second example which is uttered by an EFL, there are four external modifiers as well as one internal modifier. Since the two groups of participants are Iranian people, they are both inclined to apply external modification devices.

In terms of internal modifiers, ESLs mostly made use of past tense modals and conditional clauses. One possible justification for this can be the fact that they know how to be more influential and are aware of various polite ways of making requests as well. The application of these two internal modifiers by ESLs made them sound more native-like; in addition, as they live in English-speaking countries, they are more cautious about how to apply internal modifications in the best way possible.

On the other hand, EFLs mostly used politeness markers in terms of internal modification devices. This may have been due to the fact that they are not knowledgeable enough to use other types of internal modifiers as they have not been in an English language country and they have not had any interaction with native speakers. As a result, the only thing they know about internal modifiers is making use of the word “please” which is a simple and available internal modification device.

In terms of external modifiers, both EFLs and ESLs applied alerters and grounders more than any other external modifiers. One possible justification for applying alerters and grounders is that both EFLs and ESLs prefer not to go directly to the main request and prepare the listener for what they want to say. That’s maybe because they have a request and they do not like to seem impolite by directly jumping to the request.

The requests produced by ESLs were longer, more sophisticated, more native-like, and more context embedded, with no or few grammatical errors and mistakes. Moreover, they made use of a large number of internal and external modification devices. On the other hand, the requests produced by EFLs were shorter, limited, not complicated, Persianized, with fixed patterns and grammatical errors and mistakes.

As mentioned earlier, ESLs are in the context of the English language every day and are familiar with their culture. However, EFLs are not in the English context, so it is much more difficult for EFLs to produce context-embedded and native-like sentences with no grammatical mistakes. The results are in line with a study conducted by Lin (2009) who concluded that Chinese learners of English could not apply complex syntactic sentences. The participants of Lin's study were native speakers of English, native speakers of Chinese, and Chinese learners of English.

## **CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

The study focused on the performance of Iranian EFLs and ESLs in terms of the production of request speech act. The results indicated that in general, the performance of ESLs on request speech acts was better than the performance of EFLs. The second concern of the present study was the differences in the production of requests by Iranian EFLs and ESLs in terms of internal, external modification devices as well as request head act. According to the findings of the research, EFLs applied direct request strategies more than ESLs and ESLs used conventionally indirect requests more than EFLs. In terms of internal and external modification devices, both of the groups of participants employed external modifiers more than internal modifiers.

However, some limitations should be taken into account, and caution should be exercised in interpreting the findings of the findings because of the following reasons. First, the generalizability of the results could be undermined due to the included sample. Second, because of the difficulty of the coding procedure and the relative subjectivity inherent in such a procedure, replication research is also required to confirm the findings of the present study. Finally, EFLs might have suffered from a self-flattery syndrome and overrated themselves to project an ideal self-image of themselves when responding to the items of the questionnaire.

The findings of the study can benefit second or foreign language teachers. Accordingly, instructors could be more aware of the possible problems of learners while producing requests and apply more viable and workable techniques in classroom settings to attain better pedagogic outcomes. The fact that English learners must use both internal and external modification devices in different situations and that the EFLs can make use of conventionally indirect requests should be well attended to by second and foreign language teachers. It is obvious that EFLs experience greater difficulties producing the right request speech acts; therefore, EFL materials should be designed, improved, and rectified in a such way that are more accurately reflective of target culture norms and regulations. Finally, the findings of the present study can be useful for learners of English. English learners might become more conscious about making proper requests and the fact that they should make use of all available resources to learn how to make appropriate requests. EFLs should also be aware of the fact that male learners might need to make more efforts to produce appropriate request forms than their female counterparts.

In this study, the EFL participants were selected from the Iranian EFLs who live in Iran. Hence, it is suggested for other studies to consider Iranian EFLs who live in another EFL context other than Iran. The current research used Schauer's (2009) taxonomy for the classification of requests. Other studies can also be done using another classification for requests. This research did not consider the difference between the request production of Iranian EFL and ESL bilinguals and multilinguals. It is suggested for other studies to consider the effect of multilingualism on the request production of EFLs and ESLs. The present study considered request production differences and did not focus on other speech acts. Other studies can focus on apology speech acts, refusal speech acts, complaint speech act, etc. Finally, it is suggested to consider a specific age range for the participants since the present study did not concentrate on a specific age range.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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